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Class 204 Book W65

Accession number

CHRISTIAN ESSAYS:

204
W65

TO WHICH IS ADDED

AN ESSAY ON THE INFLUENCE OF A MORAL LIFE ON OUR JUDGMENT IN MATTERS OF FAITH.

BY THE

REV. SAMUEL CHARLES WILKS, A. M.

FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

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TO

MRS. HANNAH MORE,

THE FOLLOWING

ESSAYS

ARE AGAIN, IN THIS SECOND EDITION,

RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

WITH

AUGMENTED ESTEEM FOR HER CHARACTER,

VENERATION FOR HER TALENTS,

AND

GRATITUDE AND REGARD

FOR THE PLEASURE AND IMPROVEMENT DERIVED FROM

HER WRITINGS AND CONVERSATION,

BY

HER GREATLY OBLIGED FRIEND,

AND MOST FAITHFUL SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR

St. John's Wood, Regent's Park,
January 1, 1828.

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INTRODUCTION.

No apology can be necessary for introducing to the American public a work from the pen of the Editor of the Christian Observer. The ability with which he has conducted that celebrated journal, and the sterling value of several of his separate works, have given Mr. WILKS a reputation, which must attract notice to any production bearing his name. The present "Essays," however, have claims upon public favor, of a still more unequivocal description. They have already passed the ordeal of public opinion, and received the stamp of decided approval. Several years have now elapsed since they first issued from the English press, and this interval has only served to extend the popularity which greeted their first appearance. It is somewhat surprising, that a publication of such acknowledged merit should not have found its way, before this, through the American press.—A new and corrected edition, recently

put forth by the Author, has afforded an opportunity for supplying this deficiency—and it is hoped that by embracing it, an acceptable, and not unimportant, service has been rendered to the cause of Christianity.

Independent of their general merits, these Essays have some peculiar excellencies, to which it may be proper to advert in this place. No one can have observed the present state of theological discussion, without perceiving that there is a growing taste for simplicity and scriptural authority. The respect once paid to uninspired names and opinions, is passing away. An excited and stirring age protests against confining Christian truth in those swaddling bands of scholastic device, called Systems. It requires that Religion should be restored to its native freedom, and be exhibited with all that warmth, and freshness of coloring, which distinguished the writings of its primitive champions. There is evidently an increasing distaste for the "inventions of men" which have been engrafted upon it—which were introduced to clear it of obscurity—but which have only resulted in perplexity and dissension. In one word, that the proper province of human reason, is to investigate the credibility and import of the *Scriptures*—that the state in which *they* exhibit Religion, is pre-

cisely the state in which we are to receive it—that no attempts should be made to explain what they have left obscure, or reconcile what they have left in seeming inconsistency—these are opinions becoming every day more current and authoritative in the Christian world.

And with this improvement in the mode of theological discussion, there should be—and it is hoped there is—a corresponding improvement in the ability with which it is conducted. "The time past should suffice us" to have tolerated dull common-place, merely because it is marked by traces of piety. In the defence and illustration of Christianity, there are deserved and required the best talents of men; and before individuals enlist themselves as authors in this cause, they should possess other claims to regard, besides sincerity and zeal.

Nor should we consent longer to laud works for their strength and solidity, merely because they use the "set speech" of party, or ring the changes upon some scale of religious phraseology. There can be no reason why Religion, a subject pertaining above all others to "men's business and bosoms," should not address them in popular language. Where its peculiarities (for it has peculiarities,) are to be designated—where this designation cannot easily be made, except by a single term—

let that term be used which the Scriptures employ, and the Holy Spirit has sanctioned. This is essential to perspicuity, and should be practised, without giving the least heed to imputations of cant or fanaticism.—But where such necessity does not exist—where the Christian peculiarity can as well be expressed by circumlocution—or where the idea to be expressed involves nothing exclusively Christian—there to employ a peculiar term, is bad philosophy not less than bad taste.

If ever Christianity is to be properly understood and felt by the mass of men—especially if ever it is to command the respect and attention of cultivated men—it must put on the garb which is worn by other truths. It must clothe itself in a diction sanctioned by the usage of classical writers in other departments of Moral Science. Those technical terms, which have been so justly denominated "the lights of science, but the shades of religion," must be laid aside. Those phrases must be disused which can be learned by rote—which are so often repeated without being understood, and which tend so much to induce the pride and presumption of knowledge, without its reality. The language of Religion should be the full and free outpouring of enlightened minds, and animated hearts. It should be fit-

ted to awaken thought and feeling. It should commend itself to the best taste and judgment of the cultivated mind. In short, it should be that language which becomes a Religion destined to mingle with all the pursuits, and hallow all the thoughts and affections of men.

In these respects, the present Essays have a high claim to regard. It is not pretended that they are faultless—or that improvements might not be suggested by the intelligent reader. But it is the opinion of competent judges, that few works, embodying evangelical truth, have recently appeared, that are liable to less exception on the score either of style or sentiment. In his views of Christianity, Mr. Wilks is eminently scriptural.—He makes no attempt to be wise above what is written—to render that plain which the Holy Spirit has left obscure. He descends into no subtle distinctions, where the light of Revelation ceases to be his guide. His system of faith has the freedom from constraint which characterized the preaching of the Apostles, and recommends itself at one and the same time to our understandings, our consciences, and our hearts. In his train of thought he is clear and manly—in his diction pure, animated and impressive. When he speaks of the distinctive traits of our Religion, he does not

hesitate to call them by their distinctive names. He does not dread to illustrate and adorn his thoughts with apposite quotations from the sacred volume. But his general style is classical, and the whole work one which, while it cannot fail to instruct and interest the humblest Christian, ought to command the attention, and rouse the sensibilities, of the most enlightened.

To the original work is added another Essay of the same author, on the "Influence of a Moral Life on our Judgment in Matters of Faith." This Essay has been already republished in this country, in a pamphlet form, and is inserted here for the purpose of giving it a more permanent and extended circulation.

With the earnest prayer that this volume may be made instrumental in promoting the influence, and extending the knowledge, of pure and undefiled Religion, it is now commended to the blessing of God, and the favor of the public.

Boston, October, 1829.

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CHRISTIAN ESSAYS.

TRUE AND FALSE REPOSE IN DEATH.

If the conduct of men be a just criterion of their feelings, it would appear to be the first desire of human nature that death might never arrive; the second, we might therefore conclude, would be, that seeing death is inevitable, we may become duly prepared for its reception. This, however, though a very natural desire, is by no means always followed by a corresponding system of conduct; so that while men in general wish, with Balaam, to "die the death of the righteous," few live that life which they imagine ought to be attended with so auspicious a result.

There is but one modification of human existence which we have any good reason to believe will be accompanied with either safety or repose at our departure into another world. What is the nature of that peculiar modification cannot assuredly be doubtful; for if Christianity be a divine revelation fitted to the wants of man, and the only system which teaches him how he may obtain acceptance with God, then nothing short of the full effects of the Gospel upon a human soul can fit that soul for its eternal change. We may be moralists or philosophers; we may be esteemed wise and amiable; we may live without reproach, and

meet death without a pang; yet amidst all, if we know not practically the necessity and the value of a Redeemer, and have not obtained a scriptural hope of an interest in his salvation, we are venturing defenceless and exposed upon a wide ocean of storms and uncertainties, and are braving all the terrors of eternity without a single well-founded expectation beyond the grave.

The importance of procuring accurate ideas respecting religion and the mode of salvation, as connected with the safety and repose of a death-bed, is by no means universally considered in its full extent. There is a vague unmeaning sort of piety, or at least of what unjustly bears that sacred name, which persons in general are too often willing to consider as all that is required for sustaining with patience the approach of affliction or death. Thus a constitutional sweetness of disposition, or the negative blessing of not having been permitted to fall into any gross vices, is frequently viewed both by the sufferer and the spectators, as sufficient to render the hour of dissolution easy and the prospect of futurity welcome. If tranquillity be but obtained, it is of little consequence in the estimation of the world at large in what manner it was procured, or whether it be true or false; and thus that spiritual insensibility which, both in itself and its results, is the greatest of evils, is boasted forth as the natural and proper effect of a well-spent life.

The propriety of such a conclusion is more than questionable; for who that is conversant with the effects of sickness has not observed how often there supervenes (independently of religious considerations), a languid indifference to life or death, to the world and to eternity, which is evidently nothing more than the natural effect of affliction long-sustained, and of a mind weakened and worn out by the near approach of dissolution? The faculties almost subdued by the pressure of natural causes oftentimes leave scarcely a sufficient

degree of capacity for reflection to make it appear to the sufferer a subject of any importance what is the fate of either body or soul. Thus the mind is said to have been tranquillized, when, in fact, it was only benumbed, and rendered incapable of summoning its natural energies even to a contemplation so important and pressing as that of an eternal world.

Whether this gradual insensibility, so often attendant upon sickness, is to be viewed as a merciful provision of the Almighty in order to divest the physical circumstance of dying of a part of its terrors ;—or whether it was intended as a warning to early and deep repentance before the approach of so precarious a season, it is not at present necessary to inquire. The only inference intended to be deduced is this, that if all the terrors of futurity, all the moral pains of dissolution, all the hopes and fears of an unknown world, are so often found incapable of arousing a dying man from the natural lassitude and indifference attendant upon the slowly-approaching hour of mortality, the mere circumstance of dying in calmness is by no means a sufficient evidence of a well-grounded hope of the felicities of Heaven. The inference is still more forcible, if surrounding friends, as too often happens, have anxiously guarded every avenue, to prevent the intrusion of that religious instruction and advice which were necessary to open the eyes of the unconscious sufferer.

Moral causes may likewise combine with physical as a sedative in death. Ignorance, or unbelief, or " hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word and commandment," may spread a deceitful calm which will but end in a sad reverse of eternal bitterness and disappointment. Allowing, however, for every limitation and exception, it may still be laid down as a universal proposition, that where there visibly exists a firm belief in a future state of retribution, with a due sense of human sinfulness and guilt, nothing but the means of salvation revealed in the Gospel can give peace and

satisfaction to the soul. If the powers of mind are worn down by disease, this vivid perception may not exist; but where it really *does* exist, there is assuredly but one means of obtaining repose.

If this proposition be correct, it follows that wherever a death-bed has been really calm without any specific dependance upon the Redeemer, the effect has been produced either by *ignorance* or *unbelief;* either by not knowing and believing in a future state of retribution, or by not duly considering that guilt and sinfulness of man which ought to render the idea of retribution alarming to the fallen mind.*

These two primary causes, may, however branch out into various subordinate ones; but all these may be again traced back to their original sources of ignorance or skepticism. The various causes of falsely-happy deaths have been so well pointed out by a revered author of the present age that no apology is necessary for the quotation.

"The blind are bold; they do not see the precipice they despise.—Or, perhaps, there is less unwillingness to quit a world which has so often disappointed them, or which they have sucked to the last dregs. They leave life with less reluctance, feeling that they have exhausted all its gratifications.—Or it is a disbelief of the reality of the state on which they are about to enter.—Or it is a desire to be released from excessive pain, a desire naturally felt by those who calculate their gain rather by what they are escaping from, than by what they are to receive.—Or it is equability of temper, or firmness of nerve, or hardness of mind.—Or it is the arrogant wish to make the last act of life confirm its preceding professions.—Or it is the vanity of perpetuating their philosophic character.—Or, if

* It will be seen that in this and the following remarks, it is taken for granted that the mind is capable of due reflection, and not become languid or indifferent by disease, or kept from serious thought by any external artifice.

some faint ray of light break in, it is the pride of not retracting the sentiments which from pride they have maintained—the desire of posthumous renown among their own party; the hope to make their disciples stand firm by their example; ambition to give their last possible blow to Revelation—or, perhaps, the fear of expressing doubts which might beget a suspicion that their disbelief was not so sturdy as they would have it thought. Above all, may they not, as a punishment for their long neglect of the warning voice of truth, be given up to a strong delusion to believe the lie they have so often propagated, and really expect to find in death that eternal sleep with which they have affected to quiet their own consciences, and have really weakened the faith of others."*

Among the various particulars included in this statement there are several which do not exactly apply to the question at present under consideration. The greater number of these cases are evidently those of apparent, and not real tranquillity; cases in which a mask is worn to deceive the spectator while the mind is fully conscious of its own suppressed agitations. There are but *three* modes in which a real calm in death can be produced;—by ignorance respecting human guilt and a future state;—by skepticism concerning them; or by a knowledge that guilt has been expiated and punishment sustained on our behalf. It may not be improper to illustrate and confirm this remark by a few distinct references and observations.

If we look back to the heathen world, we shall, it is true, discover almost innumerable instances of tranquil and even triumphant dissolution; but in the majority of these cases ignorance was evidently the parent of this false peace. A human being wholly unconscious of spiritual subjects, unacquainted with his own immortality, with the nature of God and of him-

* Practical Piety, by Miss H. More.

self, with his aggravated offences against his Creator, and with the awful retribution which his offences merit, may die at ease because he "dieth as the fool dieth." Amongst persons of this class the best and most enlightened individuals of the heathen world must be included.

Ignorance sometimes assumes a different form, so that persons conscious of *part* at least of the truths just mentioned may still die in false peace through their ignorance of the remainder. One single incorrect idea, whether it be respecting the supposed indiscriminate mercy of God, or the innocence of man, or any other subject intimately connected with repose in death, may by its lethargic influence prevent the salutary effect of every other article of belief. A person may fearlessly plunge into an overwhelming stream, either from not knowing its rapidity and depth, or from a false opinion that he can stem its torrent, but in neither case is his rash security to be envied.

The example, therefore, of a heathen, however enlightened, ought not to be cited as a sufficient proof that a person ignorant of Christ, yet conscious of a future retribution, may nevertheless die in unaffected peace; for though the person in question might know much, he could not possibly know all that was necessary to render the experiment complete. Allowing, for the sake of example, that he *fully* believed in the immortality of his soul, and in a judgment to come, still he could not be *duly* sensible of his own corrupt nature and personal demerits without being first acquainted with the original condition of man, his subsequent fall, the strictness of the divine law, his own personal transgressions of it, and in short, with all those circumstances which rendered an atonement necessary for human redemption. It is only therefore in cases in which these points are fully understood and believed, that we can correctly ascertain whether any consolation short of a genuine faith and dependance

upon Jesus Christ can give satisfaction to a truly enlightened mind.

Let us then turn from the heroes and philosophers of the classical world to that large class of persons who, educated within the limits of Christendom, are seen to pass into eternity without manifesting fear or perturbation, though evidently destitute of any realizing views of that salvation, a knowledge of which is maintained to be so necessary for the repose of every well-informed and tender conscience. Instances of this kind, which are, alas! sufficiently numerous, may be urged as irreconcilable with the doctrine laid down in the preceding remarks; and in point of fact *are* so urged every day with a view to prove that after all our speculations there is in reality no great need for those religious feelings and sentiments to which persons of seriously-disposed mind usually attach the highest importance. If men, we are told, can die thus happily by means of their present general views of Christianity, there can be no particular necessity for entering more deeply into its peculiar disquisitions.

In this objection it will be seen, that the knowledge and belief of the individual in Christianity are *taken for granted* from the mere circumstance of his having been born of Christian parentage and educated in a Christian country. Should it however appear, as will be hereafter shown, that notwithstanding these advantages he may very possibly be still ignorant or unbelieving respecting some important points revealed in the Gospel, it will follow, that amidst all his presumed light and information he is but a heathen with the name of a Christian, and may therefore be but too justly included in the remarks already made respecting the nations who know not, or believe not, those truths which made an atonement indispensable.

In the mean time it should be observed, that that objection may be carried much further than the objector himself might be disposed to allow. For if the

single circumstance of calmness in death is to determine the sufficiency of a person's religious belief, heathenism itself will not be without its triumphs, and all the calm and heroic deaths of classical antiquity must henceforth be narrated as proofs of the adequacy of the systems beneath whose influence they originated. Had this calmness been connected with a due knowledge and belief, the case would have been far more relevant and convincing.

It would be, perhaps, considered as a somewhat harsh assertion, though it is perfectly true, that the deaths of a large portion of professed Christians are tranquil only on the very same grounds as those of many heathens were tranquil also. Men are oftentimes accustomed to bring forward the generic rather than the specific idea of piety. In proof of this remark, it is by no means unusual to find professedly Christian writers selecting examples of happy deaths almost indiscriminately from heathens, heretics, and true believers, with, perhaps, scarcely a single warning to point out the important specific differences between the religious systems of the various persons whose characters are discussed. Thus, under one generic name, we are told of the pious and happy death of Cyrus, or Socrates, or some other favorite of antiquity, in nearly the same terms which are elsewhere employed to characterize that of a Christian martyr or apostle. The features which are common to all are minutely pourtrayed, while those which are peculiar to the latter are overlooked. It is the frame of mind simply considered, and not as connected with Christian truth, that excites their attention. The marked and important difference, not merely between the hopes of these classes of persons, but also between the grounds on which those hopes depend, is quite overlooked amidst the spurious Catholicism of a universal creed. The worshipper of Jehovah and of Jove are placed side by side; and because the one found in an

awful ignorance of his moral condition that calm which the other derived from a well-founded hope in his Redeemer, it is predicted of both alike that they expired in piety and peace.

It would however be very probably urged by the objector in return, that his argument was intended to apply solely to professed Christians. He would, perhaps, allow that in a heathen, or even in a vicious man, a peaceful death must of course be connected with a considerable degree of ignorance or unbelief; but he would add, that where the individual was a baptized person, and there existed no particular viciousness of character, calmness in death, even though unconnected with any peculiar reliance on the atonement of Christ, would be nevertheless not a deceitful but a rational and well-founded repose, grounded on general views of the Creator's mercy, though not specifically dependent upon any idea of the merits and propitiation of the Redeemer.

Here then we return to the precise point of controversy; and in every view of the subject it is far from being an idle speculation; for if what is currently applauded and envied as an easy and hopeful death, be in truth oftentimes nothing more than the natural consequence of ignorance or infidelity, or both in conjunction, nothing surely can be more evident than the necessity of careful self-examination, in order that our tranquillity in dissolution may not be followed by a far more dreadful death than the one whose terrors we had thoughtlessly despised.

How often do we hear it remarked respecting persons the most heedless and irreligious, that "he died like a lamb."—*He died like a lamb!* Impossible, if in the full possession of his mental faculties he seriously contemplated his Maker and himself, as they are both exhibited in Scripture, without at the same time taking fully into his account the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Impossible, if he adequately saw and felt

the disease without being enabled to apply the remedy. Impossible, if he knew and believed his guilt, without reposing by faith in Him who alone can take away the sin of the world. If dying ignorant of Christ Jesus, he died in comfort, or at least in what unjustly bears that name, he could not assuredly credit the denunciations of Divine wrath; or, believing them, did not see how justly they applied to himself. Here then existed some degree of ignorance or unbelief; and, in fact, there is no subject upon which men in general, even in a Christian country, are so skeptical as on that of their own personal sinfulness and spiritual inability. If they do not discredit altogether the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, they are at least ignorant or unbelieving respecting their own individual demerits, and consequently expect, what the Almighty has no where promised to grant, that their contaminated and imperfect righteousness shall be found worthy of procuring their admission into heaven. But if they really felt, with the true members of the church, that "there is *no* health in them," nothing short of a scriptural knowledge of the great Physician of souls could possibly calm their apprehensions. If they seriously believed that eternal punishment is their desert by nature, they could venture to cherish no hope of heaven but by the free grace of Christ. The expectation of the end without any reference to the only means is evidently a serious error; or if, in order to supply this defect, the means are supposed to consist in human merit and human works, that very ignorance is incidentally betrayed the existence of which it was the object of the present argument to prove. To know Revelation justly includes in its very elements the knowledge of our being by nature in a situation so guilty and alarming that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission."

It is true that hardness of heart, and the other causes which have been already enumerated, may con-

duce to a false peace; but the means by which they operate are undoubtedly connected with the encouragement of latent ignorance, or infidelity; for were the whole subject *fully* understood and credited, who would be *able* to harden his heart, or proudly to cherish an unfounded confidence? To discern accurately and believe fully would create in the dying sinner much the same mental feelings as those which he must necessarily experience at the last day, when knowledge and conviction shall both irresistibly flash upon his conscience. The awfulness of his condition will not be in itself more alarming a million of years hence than it is at the moment of dissolution, and the only reason why it will affect the mind in a more powerful and impressive manner is, that he will then be permitted no longer to fortify his heart either by misconception or skeptical indifference. Satiety and disappointment, equability of nerve and philosophical pride, with all those other causes which have been mentioned in a preceding extract,* would have no power to make a sinner really calm in death, were they not combined with some secret ignorance or doubt respecting the certainty of that eternal punishment which his sins have incurred.

The case of our great English moralist is a most decisive illustration of the impossibility of discovering any mode of solacing a scripturally enlightened conscience except that which the Gospel has revealed. Had Dr. Johnson been ignorant of his sinfulness in the sight of God, he might have expired, as thousands every day expire, in a blind and fatal repose; or had he been inclined to infidelity, he might have jested, like Hume and others of a similar school, on the subject of his approaching dissolution. Neither, however, of these effects would have constituted that true peace which his spiritually directed mind so eagerly sought, and which, before his death, he most certainly obtained.

* Page 4.

A few practical remarks upon the subject of the last hours of this illustrious man will not only be a forcible comment upon the foregoing propositions, but will tend to show that what Dr. Johnson's best biographers have been almost ashamed to confess, and have industriously exerted themselves to palliate, constituted, in truth, the most auspicious circumstance of his life, and was the best proof of his increase in religious knowledge and holiness of mind.

Whoever considers with a Christian eye the death of Dr. Johnson will readily perceive that, according to the usual order of Providence, it could not have been free from agitation and anxiety. Johnson was a man of tender conscience, and one who from his very infancy had been instructed in Christian principles. But he was also, in the strict judgment of revealed religion, an inconsistent man. Neither his habits nor his companions had been such as his own conscience approved; and even a short time before his end we find one of his biographers lamenting that "the visits of idle and some worthless persons were never unwelcome to him," on the express ground that "these things drove on time." His ideas of morality being of the highest order, many things which are considered by men at large as but venial offences appeared to him as positive crimes. Even his constitutional indolence and irritability of mind were sufficient of themselves to keep him constantly humbled and self-abased; and though among his gay or literary companions he usually appears upon the comparatively high ground of a Christian moralist, and the strenuous defender of revealed religion, yet compared with the Divine standard and test of truth, he felt himself both defective and disobedient.

Together with this conscientious feeling he had adopted certain incorrect, not to say superstitious, ideas, respecting the method of placating the Deity. He seems, for example, to have believed that *penance*, in its confined and popish sense, as distinguished from

simple penitence, is of great avail in procuring the Divine favor and forgiveness. Thus when his conscience distressed him on account of an act of disobedience to his parent, we find him many years afterwards remaining a considerable time bare-headed in the rain, exposed in the public streets to the ridicule and the conjectures of every spectator. As far as filial affection and true amiableness of mind are concerned, the actor in such a scene deserves and ensures universal veneration and esteem. Even while we smile at the somewhat ludicrous nature of the action, we instinctively feel a sympathy and respect which perhaps a wiser but less remarkable mode of exhibiting his feelings might not have procured. But Johnson seems to have performed this humiliation from higher considerations than mere sorrow for the past; for he emphatically adds, "In contrition I stood, and I hope the *penance was expiatory.*"

If these words really mean any thing—and when did Dr. Johnson utter words without meaning?—he must have intended by them to express his hope that the previous fault was really *atoned for*, in a religious sense, by the subsequent act of self-denial; or, in other words, that God accepts human penance as an expiation for human sins; a doctrine to which revealed religion gives no sanction whatever. Johnson's system appears at this time to have been, as it were, a sort of barter between himself and Heaven, and consequently his chief fear was, lest the equivalent which he presented should not be sufficient to *entitle* him in the divine mercy to the pardon of his transgressions. His trust on the Redeemer, though perfectly sincere, does not appear to have been either exclusive or implicit; for though all his prayers for mercy and acknowledgements of blessings were offered up solely through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, he seems, in point of fact, for many years to have viewed the atonement rather as a medium through which God is pleased

to accept our imperfect services and to make them adequate, by the conditions of a remedial law, to the purchase of heaven, than as a sacrifice by which *alone* heaven is fully secured and freely given to the believing penitent. Dr. Johnson's line of reading in Divinity was perhaps unfavorable to a full perception of Christian truth. The writings of Mr. Law, in particular, which he had studied with some attention, were by no means well adapted to his peculiar case. For a thoughtless, a frivolous, or an impenitent sinner, the "Serious Call" might have been eminently useful in exciting a deep consciousness of guilt, a salutary remorse for the past, and holy resolutions for the future; and as far as these elements of religion extend, the perusal of this celebrated book might doubtless have had some good effect upon the mind of Dr. Johnson. But in the consolatory parts of the Gospel, in the free and undisguised exhibition of a Redeemer whose sacrifice is perfect and all-sufficient, in the inculcation of the gracious promises of a reconciled Father to the returning prodigal, Law, and other writers of a similar school, are undoubtedly defective, and the same defect seems to have characterized for many years the views of our illustrious moralist. He lived in a perpetual dilemma, by trusting to works which his well-informed conscience told him were not good, and yet on the goodness of which, in conjunction at least with the merits of Christ, he placed his dependence for eternity.

To give therefore comfort to the mind of such a man as Dr. Johnson, there were but two modes; either by blinding his conscience, or by increasing his faith; either by extenuating his sins, or by pointing out in all its glories the sufficiency of the Christian ransom. The friends who surrounded this eminent man during the greater part of his life, were little qualified to perform the latter, and therefore very naturally resorted to the former. They found their patient, so to speak, in agony; but instead of examining the wound and

applying the remedy, they contented themselves with administering anodynes and opiates, and persuading their afflicted friend, that there existed no cause of danger or alarm.

But Johnson was not thus deceived. The *nostrum* which has lulled its millions to a fatal repose, on him, by the mercy of God, had no effect. His convictions of sin were as lasting as they were deep; it was not therefore until he had discarded his natural and long-cherished views of commutation and human desert, and had learned to trust humbly and exclusively to his Saviour, that his mind became at peace.

Let us view some of the recorded circumstances of the transaction; and in so doing, we shall, as Christians, have much more occasion to applaud the scriptural correctness of Johnson's feelings respecting the value of his soul, and the guilt of his nature, and the inadequacy of man's best merits and repentance, than to congratulate him upon the accession of such "miserable comforters" as those who appear to have surrounded his dying pillow.

Finding him in great mental distress, "I told him," remarks one of his biographers,* "of the many enjoyments of which I thought him in possession, namely, a permanent income, tolerable health, a high degree of reputation for his moral qualities and literary exertions," &c. Had Johnson's depression of mind been nothing more than common melancholy or discontent, these topics of consolation would have been highly appropriate; they might also have been fitly urged as arguments for gratitude and thanksgiving to the Almighty, on account of such exalted mercies. In either of these points of view, the piety of Dr. Johnson would doubtless have prompted him to acknowledge the value of the blessing, and the duty of contentment and praise. But, as arguments for quieting an alarmed

* Sir John Hawkins.

conscience, they were quite inadequate, for what would it have profited this distinguished man, to have gained all his well-merited honors, or even were it possible, the world itself, if, after all, he should become, as he himself afterwards expressed it, "a castaway?"

The feelings of Dr. Johnson on this subject were more fully evidenced on a subsequent occasion. "One day, in particular," remarks Sir John Hawkins, "when I was suggesting to him these and the like reflections, he gave thanks to Almighty God, but added, that notwithstanding all the above benefits, the prospect of death, which was now at no great distance from him, was become terrible, and that he could not think of it but with great pain and trouble of mind." Nothing assuredly could be more correct than Dr. Johnson's distinction. He acknowledged the value of the mercies which he enjoyed, and he gratefully "gave thanks to Almighty God" for them; but he felt that they could not soften the terrors of a death-bed, or make the prospect of meeting his Judge less painful and appalling. Hawkins, who could not enter into his illustrious friend's more just and enlarged views of human guilt and frailty, confesses himself to have been "very much surprised and shocked at such a declaration from such a man," and proceeded therefore to urge for his comfort the usual arguments of extenuation. He reports that he "told him that he conceived his life to have been a uniform course of virtue; that he had ever shown a deep sense of, and zeal for religion; and that, both by his example and his writings, he had recommended the practice of it; that he had not rested, as many do, in the exercise of common honesty, avoiding the grosser enormities, yet rejecting those advantages that result from the belief of Divine Revelation; but that he had, by prayer and other exercises of devotion, cultivated in his mind the seeds of goodness, and was become habitually pious."

This was the rock on which numberless professed Christians have fatally split; and to the mercy of the Almighty must it be ascribed, that the great and good Dr. Johnson did not add one more to the melancholy catalogue. For what was the doctrine which the narrator attempted to inculcate but this? that his friend, like the Pharisee in the Gospel, ought to place his confidence upon his being more meritorious than other men, and instead of attributing the praise to Him who had "made him to differ," was to "sacrifice to his own net, and burn incense to his own drag." Can we wonder, that with such flattering doctrines constantly sounding in his ears, Dr. Johnson was suffered to undergo much severe mental discipline, in order to reduce him in his own esteem to that lowly place, which as a human, and consequently a fallen being, it was his duty, however high his attainments or his talents, to occupy?

The snare of spiritual pride, which Sir John Hawkins thus unconsciously spread for his dying friend, was the more seductive from the circumstance of Dr. Johnson's life having been upon the whole correct and laudable, and from his writings having been eminently useful for the promotion of morality and virtue. The convictions of a profligate man might have been supposed too keen and alarming to be quieted by such common-place soporifics; but where there was really so much apparent cause for self-complacency and gratulation, as in the case of Dr. Johnson, it must appear almost wonderful that the self-righteous delusion did not succeed.

It would undoubtedly have given this biographer much satisfaction to have heard from his friend the usual language of an unsubdued heart. "I thank God, that upon the whole I have acted my part well upon the stage of life. We are all frail and fallible, but I have no great sins to account for. I have been honest and charitable; my conduct, I trust, has been, with

some few exceptions, 'one uniform course of virtue;' I therefore die in peace, looking forward to that happiness which, I trust, my actions have ensured, from a God of infinite mercy and compassion." But to the humble and well-informed Christian, the penitential sorrows of Johnson, (springing, as they did, from a heart ill at ease with itself; not so much on account of any one flagrant sin as from a general sense of the exalted nature of the divine law and the imperfections of the best human obedience,) will appear a happier and surer pledge of his scriptural renovation of mind than the most rapturous expressions which Pharisaic confidence could have produced.

The self-righteous arguments of Hawkins could not, however, touch the case of Johnson. "These suggestions," he continues, "made little impression on him; he lamented the indolence in which he had spent his life; talked of secret transgressions, and seemed desirous of telling me more to that purpose than I was willing to hear." Happy was it for Dr. Johnson that his confessor's arguments produced so little effect, and that he was at length instructed by a better guide than his well-meaning, but inexperienced friend. Had the arguments of Hawkins effected their intended operation, we should have seen one of the greatest and most powerful minds that ever animated a human frame, quitting its frail receptacle in a flimsy robe of self-righteousness, which must have fallen from its grasp immediately after death, leaving the soul naked, and guilty, and defenceless before its Almighty Judge.

It is easy to conceive the language of a plain practical Christian, while he stood beside the death-bed of such a man as Dr. Johnson, and poured in the balm of religious consolation. "I fully admit," he might have said, "your sins, yet I would point you to an all-powerful Saviour, and turn those very apprehensions and that godly sorrow into motives for repose. True, you are in yourself all that you have confessed your-

self to be; and if you were not, a Redeemer would be of no value, for Christ came 'not to heal the whole, but them that are sick.' I rejoice that you thus feel and acknowledge your transgressions; for though beyond most men you have cause for gratitude, though you have enjoyed God's highest gifts, though by his preventing grace, operating through the medium of a religious education and a tender conscience, you have been enabled to preserve a moral deportment, yet your 'righteousness extendeth not unto God.' What you have you have received, and great therefore as may have been your talents, and useful as may have been your life, you have nothing so good and perfect as to be fit to offer to the Almighty as a claim to heaven. Yet, on the other hand, is not your very consciousness of guilt the best hope of safety, the brightest omen of pardon? Has it not bowed you down in contrition? Has it not taught you the inestimable value of the Redeemer's sacrifice and death? You acknowledge yourself a sinner; and what is the characteristic of the Gospel, but that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin? On this rock only can you find a firm foundation for the hopes of a human soul; but here it may build securely, amidst all the agitating storms of an alarmed conscience and a tempestuous world. Repose then upon your Saviour in simple and firm reliance, knowing that he possesses the same ability and will to be merciful to you as to him who, like you, confessed himself the 'chief of sinners,' but who nevertheless found peace in his Redeemer, and was eventually filled 'with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Look then to Him who is 'the Author and Finisher of our faith,' and to Him from whom 'all good desires do proceed;' contemplate the end, the nature, the extent, the value of the sacrifice of Christ, and see whether there be any scriptural reason why *you* should be excluded from its benefits. Look also to that Divine Spirit, who is the guide, the enlightener, the consoler,

and the sanctifier of the Christian Church, to subdue unbelief, to increase faith, and to implant a never-ending hope which shall support you amidst all the afflictions of life, and raise you far above the terrors of the grave."

Thus a plain and honest religious friend might have gone on to "preach the Gospel" in that simplicity with which it was at first dispensed, and to exhibit, in all their amplitude and freedom, the grace, the mercy, the compassion of God; the atonement and intercession of Christ; the promised influence of the Holy Spirit; with every other topic connected with the salvation and happiness of a penitent transgressor. There might, indeed, have been nothing remarkably novel or inviting in the manner of stating these simple truths; yet, coming from a warm and honest heart, and being accompanied with that divine benediction which is never wanting where the soul has been prepared by humility and contrition for its reception, they might have produced the happiest effects, when philosophic suasion and human advice had exerted themselves in vain. In moments of great mental distress, arguments which even a child in religion could readily discover and apply, might be wanting to quiet the mind of even such a man as Dr. Johnson himself.

But in the narrative of Hawkins, and in the arguments which we find him proposing to the dying moralist, these and similar topics of genuine consolation appear to have had no place. That "blood which cleanseth from all sin" is scarcely, or only incidentally, mentioned; and we find the narrator continuing in the following strain his inefficient consolations:

"In a visit which I made him in a few days, in consequence of a very pressing request to see me, I found him laboring under very great dejection of mind. He bade me draw near to him, and said he wanted to enter into a serious conversation with me; and upon my expressing my willingness to join in it, he, with a

look that cut me to the heart, told me that he had the prospect of death before him, and that he dreaded to meet his Saviour. I could not but be astonished at such a declaration, and advised him, as I had done before, to reflect on the course of his life, and the services which he had rendered to the cause of religion and virtue, as well by his example as his writings; to which he answered, that he had written as a philosopher, but had not lived like one. In the estimation of his offences he reasoned thus: 'Every man knows his own sins, and what grace he has resisted. But to those of others, and the circumstances under which they were committed, he is a stranger. He is therefore to look on himself as the greatest sinner that he knows of.' At the conclusion of this argument, which he strongly enforced, he uttered this passionate [impassioned] exclamation: 'Shall I, who have been a teacher of others, be myself a cast-away?'"

In this interesting passage—interesting as detailing the religious progress of such a mind as Dr. Johnson's—how many important facts and reflections crowd upon the imagination! We see the highest human intellect unable at the approach of death to find a single argument for hope or comfort, though stimulated by the mention of all the good deeds and auspicious forebodings which an anxious and attentive friend could suggest. Who that beholds this eminent man thus desirous to open his mind, and to "enter into a serious conversation" upon the most momentous of all subjects which can interest an immortal being, but must regret that he had not found a spiritual adviser who was capable of fully entering into his feelings, and administering scriptural consolation to his afflicted mind?

The narrator informs us in this passage, that "he could not but be astonished at such a declaration" as that which Dr. Johnson made. But in reality, where was the real ground for astonishment? Is it astonishing that an inheritor of a fallen and corrupt nature, who

is about to quit the world, and to be "judged according to the deeds done in the body," should be alarmed at the anticipation of the event, and be anxious to understand fully the only mode of pardon and acceptance? Rather is it not astonishing that *every* other intelligent man does not feel at his last hour the same anxieties which Dr. Johnson experienced?—unless, indeed, they have been previously removed by the hopes revealed in that glorious dispensation which alone undertakes to point out in what way the Almighty sees fit to pardon a rebellious world. No man would or could have been astonished who knew his own heart; for, as Dr. Johnson truly remarked, every Christian, how fair soever his character in the estimation of others, ought to look upon himself as "the greatest sinner that he knows of;" a remark, be it observed, which shows how deeply Dr. Johnson had begun to drink into the spirit of that great Apostle, who, amidst all his excellencies, confessed and felt himself, as was just remarked, "the chief of sinners."

What a contrast does the advice of Hawkins, as stated by himself in the preceding passage, form to the scriptural exhortation of our own Church! Instead of advising his friend seriously to examine himself "whether he repented him truly of his former sins, steadfastly purposing (should he survive) to lead a new life, having a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death, and being in charity with all men," he bids him look back to his past goodness, and is astonished that the survey is not attended with the hope and satisfaction which he had anticipated. But the truth was, that on the subject of religion, as on every other, Dr. Johnson entertained far more correct ideas than the friends around him; and though he had not hitherto found peace with his Creator, through the blood of Jesus Christ, yet he could not be satisfied with the ordinary consolations of an uninformed or Pharisaic mind.

The sun did not, however, set in this long continued cloud; for Johnson at length obtained comfort, where alone *true* comfort could be obtained, in the sacrifice and mediation of Jesus Christ; a circumstance to which Sir John Hawkins transiently alludes, but the particulars of which must be supplied from the narrative of Boswell, whose words are as follows:

"Dr. Brocklesby, who will not be suspected of fanaticism, obliged me with the following account: '*For some time before his death all his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his trust in the merits and propitiation of Jesus Christ. He talked often to me about the necessity of faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, as necessary, beyond all good works whatever, for the salvation of mankind.*'"

Even allowing for the brevity of this statement, and for the somewhat chilling circumstance of its coming from the pen of a man who "will not be suspected of fanaticism," what a triumph was here for the plain unsophisticated doctrines of the Gospel, especially that of free justification by faith in Jesus Christ! After every other means had been tried, and tried in vain, a simple penitential reliance upon the sacrifice of the Redeemer, produced in the heart of this devout man a peace and satisfaction which no reflections upon human merit could bestow. He seems to have acquired a completely new idea of Christian theology, and could doubtless henceforth practically adopt the animating language of his own church in her eleventh article, "that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort."

There are several ways in which the distress of Dr. Johnson during his latter years may be considered, of which the most correct perhaps is that of its having been permitted as a kind and fatherly chastisement from the Almighty for the inconsistencies of his life. Both Johnson himself and his most partial biographer intimate that his character was not perfectly free even

from gross sins : but, omitting these unpleasant recollections, we are at least certain that his general habits and companions during a considerable part of his life were not such as a strictly consistent Christian would have chosen, because they were not such as could in any way conduce to his spiritual comfort or improvement. Dr. J. was indeed called in the usual course of Providence to "live in the world," but it was his duty so to have lived in it "as not of it;" and with the high sense which he uniformly entertained of religion, and the vast influence which he had justly acquired in society, his conduct and example would have been of the greatest service in persuading men to a *holy* as well as a *virtuous* life, to a cordial and complete self-dedication to God, as well as to a general decorum and purity of conduct.

It is certain that in reflecting upon his past life he did not view it as having been truly and decidedly Christian. He even prays in his dying hours that God would "pardon his *late conversion;*" thus evidencing not simply the usual humility and contrition of every genuine Christian, but, in addition to this, a secret consciousness that his heart had never before been entirely "right with God."

Had Johnson survived this period of his decisive "conversion," we might have expected to have seen throughout his conduct that he had indeed become "a new creature in Christ Jesus." His respect for religion, and his general excellence of character, could not perhaps have admitted of much visible change for the better; but in heavenly-mindedness, in love and zeal for the souls of men, in deadness to the world and to fame, in the choice of books and companions, and in the exhibition of all those spiritual graces which belong peculiarly to the Christian nature, we might and must have beheld a marked improvement. Instead of being merely the Seneca of the English nation, he might possibly have become its Saint Paul; and would

doubtless in future have embodied his moral injunctions, not in the cold form of ethical philosophy, or even in the generalities of the Christian religion, but in an ardent love to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; in a union to the Redeemer and a dependence upon that Holy Spirit who is the Enlightener and Sanctifier. That such a supposition is not visionary, may be proved even from the meagre accounts afforded by a spectator who would of course be inclined rather to soften down than to give prominence to any thing which might be construed into "fanaticism." We learn then from this witness, that in point of fact there was already a marked alteration in Dr. Johnson's language upon religion, as instead of spending his time upon barren generalities, "*he talked often about the necessity of faith in Jesus.*" That of which Dr. Johnson spoke thus earnestly and often, must doubtless have appeared to him as of the utmost importance; and we have to lament—if indeed any dispensation of Providence may be lawfully lamented—that Johnson had not lived to check the Pelagianism and Pharisaism of his age, by proclaiming "often," and with all the weight of his authority, that "faith in the sacrifice of Jesus is necessary, beyond all good works whatever, for the salvation of mankind."

It will of course be readily allowed, that the constitutional melancholy of this great man might have had much influence in causing this religious depression; but whatever may have been the *proximate* cause, the affliction itself may still be viewed as performing the office of parental correction to reclaim his relapses, and teach him the hatefulness and folly of sin. But without speculating upon either the final or the efficient cause, the medium through which that cause operated was evidently an indistinctness in his views respecting the nature of the Redeemer's atonement; an indistinctness common to Dr. Johnson with no small class of moralists and learned men. He believed generally

in the sacrifice of Christ, but he knew little of its fulness and its freeness, and he was unable to appropriate it to his own case. He was perhaps little in the habit of contemplating the Son of God as "a great High-Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and who is graciously interceding on our behalf. The character of the Almighty as a reconciled Father and Friend, with whom he was to have daily "communion and fellowship," was less prominent in his thoughts than those attributes which render him "a consuming fire." He feared and respected religion rather than loved it, and by building his structure for many years on a self-righteous foundation, rendered the whole fabric liable to be overthrown by the first attack of an accusing conscience.

In reply to any general inference to be derived from these remarks, it may be urged, that Dr. Johnson's was a peculiar and exempt case; and that his painful feeling of sin, and his consequent dissatisfaction with his own righteousness, were rather the effect of his natural malady than of any peculiarly correct ideas upon religion. But even admitting this to have been the fact, the inference is still nearly the same; for who can assert that either *his* understanding or *his* character has been superior to Dr. Johnson's, and that therefore *he* may be justly sustained in death by a support which this eminent man—from whatever cause—found unavailing. If the greatest moralist of his age and nation was obliged at length to seek repose in the same free mercy which pardoned the thief upon the cross, who that knows his own heart will henceforth venture to glory in himself? The conscience may indeed be seared; we may not feel as Johnson felt; we may be ignorant both of God and of ourselves; and thus, for want of knowing or believing our spiritual danger, may leave the world with a false tranquillity, and enter the presence of our Creator "with a lie in our right hand." All this, however, is our misfortune,

and ought not to be our boast; for if our minds were as religiously enlightened, and our hearts as correctly impressed as Dr. Johnson's, we could obtain hope only where he obtained it, by "faith in the sacrifice of Jesus."

The case, however, of Dr. Johnson is *not* an exempt case; for what has been the feeling of true Christians in every age, but one of a similar, though perhaps less marked and conspicuous kind?

The devout and eminent George Herbert remarked upon his death-bed, "I have *nothing* to present to God but sin and misery; but the first is pardoned, and a few hours will now put an end to the latter." His friend, like Dr. Johnson's, began to remind him of "his many acts of mercy," but this holy man ventured not to put any trust in them for his salvation. "*They be good works*," said he, "*if they be sprinkled with the blood of Christ, but not otherwise.*" He did not speak slightly upon the subject of good works; he felt their importance and necessity; and doubtless concurred with that kindred spirit, Richard Hooker, in his well-known remark, "We acknowledge a dutiful necessity of doing well, but the meritorious dignity of doing well we utterly renounce." No inference therefore can be more wide of that intended to be deduced in the present essay, than that the retrospect of a holy life is of little importance upon a death-bed. On the contrary, good men in every age have felt it to be a high consolation, and a source of the most unbounded gratitude to God, if they have been enabled by his grace to maintain a holy and exemplary deportment; but as the meritorious cause of human redemption, as the plea upon which our hopes are to be founded for eternity, nothing assuredly can be more unscriptural and fallacious than self-dependence and desert.

Dr. John Donne, the proverbially pious satirist and poet of the sixteenth century, remarked upon his death-bed, in nearly the same words with his friend

George Herbert, "Though of myself I have *nothing* to present to God but sin and misery, yet I know he looks upon me, not as I am in myself, but as I am in my Saviour."

With the names of Donne and Herbert is intimately and pleasingly associated that of the meek and learned Hooker; and who that has heard of the eminently religious, and amiable life of this revered man, but remembers also his deeply penitential confession in the hour of death? "I have lived to see that this world is made up of perturbations, and I have long been preparing to leave it, and gathering comfort for the dreadful hour of making my account with God, which I now apprehend to be near. And though I have by his grace loved him in my youth, and feared him in mine age, and labored to have a conscience void of offence to him, and to all men; yet if thou, O Lord, be extreme to mark what I have done amiss, who can abide it? And therefore where I have failed, Lord, show mercy to me; *for I plead not my righteousness, but the forgiveness of my unrighteousness, for His merits who died to purchase a pardon for penitent sinners.*" It was this plea of free grace that enabled him to say with his last breath, "God hath heard my daily petitions; for I am at peace with all men, and he is at peace with me; and from which blessed assurance I feel that inward joy, which this world can neither give nor take from me."

After mentioning Hooker, we ought not to pass over that other great apologist of the church of England, Bishop Jewel, from whom we hear similar confessions and anticipations. He was not, he said, afraid to die, but assigned as his reason, not the goodness of his past life, though it had been almost inimitably good, but that he had "a gracious Lord," adding, "there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.—*Christ is my righteousness.*"

But these persons, it may be said, were divines, and

might therefore be supposed to be more intimately acquainted with the technical language of religion than other men. Select then the case of the virtuous and heroic Philip Sidney.* He was a soldier, and a brave one; yet he died the death of a humble Christian. In him we see a character upon which calumny herself has been able to fix no spot. His country reposed upon him with full confidence as its most hopeful friend and protector, and in defence of that country he lost, in the field of battle, his valuable life. Posterity has vied with his contemporaries in doing justice to his memory and perpetuating his varied excellencies. The venerable Camden speaks of him at once with rapture and regret, as "the great hope of mankind," "the most lively pattern of virtue, and the darling of the world;" the hero "whose virtues have come to perfection," and whom men ought for ever to commemorate "not with tears but admiration." Yet this man, of whom historians foretold that "Sidney shall live to posterity," and upon whose virtues and untimely death rival universities poured forth volume upon volume of eulogies and regrets;—this man, thus flattered and caressed, found at length that "all was vanity," and that nothing could give him peace upon a death-bed but the same humble hope which fills the bosom of the most illiterate and lowly Christian.

As a soldier, nothing could daunt the mind of Sir Philip Sidney; yet, remarks one of his biographers, "the guilt of sin, the present beholding of death, the terror of God's judgment-seat, which seemed in hot displeasure to cut him down, concurring, did make a

* It may perhaps be necessary to apologize for the triteness of such examples as Johnson, Herbert, Donne, Hooker, Jewel, Sidney, &c. which are selected, not because others equally appropriate, and less hackneyed, might not have been easily produced; but because the celebrity of these persons renders their conduct more interesting and convincing than that of persons less generally known and admired. Novelty therefore has been purposely rejected for the sake of practical effect.

fear and astonishment in his mind." He, however, at length obtained peace through his Saviour, "giving thanks to God that he did chastise him with a loving and fatherly coercion, and to his singular profit, whether to live or die." Deeply feeling his transgressions, he "vowed with an unfeigned heart and full purpose, if God should give him life, to consecrate the same to his service, and to make his glory the mark of all his actions."

The mental distress of Sidney did not arise, any more than that of Dr. Johnson, from the usual remorse attendant upon an irregular and vicious life. On the contrary, both these men had lived virtuously and usefully in the world; but, amidst all their exemplary qualities, they could find no security in their last hours except in self-renunciation and faith in Christ. Sidney's biographer expressly relates that, "although he had professed the gospel, loved and favoured those who did embrace it, entered deeply into the concerns of the church, taken good order and very good care for his family and soldiers to be instructed, and be brought to live accordingly; yet entering into deep examination of his life now in the time of his affliction, he felt those inward motions and workings of* [God's Holy Spirit in his conscience] exciting him to a deep sorrow for his former conduct." Again, "his former virtues seemed nothing, for he wholly condemned his former life." "I have no comfort," added he, "in that way: [reflecting on his past virtues,] all things in my former life have been vain, vain, vain."

How different these expressions of a renewed heart from that unscriptural common-place gratulation which is so often witnessed on similar occasions! If even a Sidney, that "most lively pattern of virtue," could not look back with complacency or forward with hope, trusting in any measure to his own merits, who under similar circumstances of life can be reasonably consid-

* Hiatus in MS.

cred as entitled to a higher degree of self-confidence? The important subject which occupied his time from the moment of his fatal wound to his death, was the ascertaining the real bearings of his religious character.

"He did grow weaker and weaker in body, and thereby gathered that he should die, which caused him to enter yet into a more correct consideration of himself, what assurance he had of salvation; and having, by the promises of God, and testimony of his graces which he felt working in him, gathered his assurance of God's favour unto eternal life, and made him perceive that he did chastise him, as a most kind Father, to fashion him to his will, he said that he feared not to die."

This paragraph, though couched in language very different from the current phrases of modern theology, being such as to many persons may appear somewhat unphilosophical and enthusiastic, contains, when properly considered, a most important lesson for ascertaining the truth or fallacy of our religious hopes. Sir Philip Sidney, we find, was desirous as every dying man of course ought to be, of ascertaining "what assurance he had of salvation," which, on the ground of human desert, we have already seen he did not venture to expect. In order to come to a decision, he directs his view to the "promises of God" as revealed in scripture, and the "testimony of his graces" as exhibited in his own heart; or, in other words, he first endeavors to discover to whom pardon is offered in the gospel, and then proceeds to examine how far he was himself included in the character described. He founded his hopes wholly and exclusively upon God's immutable "promise" in Christ; yet, at the same time, brought the subject to a practical account, by inquiring whether the "graces" of the Christian life had been implanted in himself.

Thus this celebrated man "wrought out his own sal-

vation with fear and trembling," knowing that "it was God that worked in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure." For some time his frequent subject of lamentation was that "he had not a full and sure dependence upon Christ;" and thus "sowing in tears," he ultimately "reaped in joy;" for it was not long before he began to exclaim with almost his expiring breath, "I would not change my joy for the empire of the world." From this moment his religious comfort seems never to have left him; for, observes the above-mentioned biographer, "It now seemed as if all natural heat and life were almost utterly gone out of him; that his understanding had failed, and that it was to no purpose to speak any more unto him. But it was far otherwise. I spake thus unto him: 'Sir, if you hear what I say, let us by some means know it; and if you have still your inward joy and consolation in God, hold up your hand.' With that he did lift up his hand and stretched it forth on high, which we thought he could scarce have moved; which caused the beholders to cry out with joy that his understanding should still be perfect, and that the weak body, beyond all expectation, should so readily give a sign of the joy of the soul."

For death thus to become a delightful instead of a terrific image, the spiritual *affections* as well as understanding must have been duly cultivated. To him who can really say with the apostle respecting his Redeemer, "whom having not seen I love;" or with the Psalmist, "whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee;" the dissolution of soul and body can present no unwelcome theme of meditation. But a cold and speculative theology, even should there be nothing heterodox in the creed, or very exceptionable in the life, will not support a mortal sinking into eternity. At such a moment, the helpless soul feels its need of a Father, a Protector, a Guide: it is about to pass into that awful

and unknown world whence it can never return, and desires therefore an Almighty Friend to welcome its arrival. It is not the Deity, simply considered, but "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," that renders heaven a wished-for and congenial abode to the genuine believer.

To an ardent and grateful attachment to the Redeemer, not less than to faith in his merits and obedience, must be ascribed the pleasurable anticipations of holy men in death. Stephen expired in peace, notwithstanding his outward sufferings, because he "looked unto Jesus," and trusted to him to "receive his spirit." Saint Paul beheld with delight the future world, because he "knew in whom he had believed," and had arrived at the joyful conclusion that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Or, to advert to later examples, the venerable Bede, amidst much bodily infirmity, exclaimed that he "earnestly wished to behold the King in his beauty;" and the celebrated Peter Du Moulin, reproving a friend who spoke highly of his good works, remarked how greatly he was grieved by such flattering language, and attributed all he had done to the sovereign grace of God operating by the weakest instrument; adding, on another occasion, "My God, how weary am I! When shall I rest in thy bosom? When shall I drink of the river of thy pleasures? I am unworthy of it, O my God! but thou art glorified by doing good to the unworthy. It is not for them who are whole, but for those who are sick that thy Son, the great Physician, was sent. I am going to my Father and my God: I go to him with confidence, *for he has arrayed me with the robe of his righteousness.*"

How different from these sublime aspirations were the forebodings of the most virtuous heathens! Death had not to them lost its sting, nor was the grave robbed of its terrors. Doubt and uncertainty were their brightest portion; there *might* be a future state, and

the virtuous *might* be happy after death; but beyond this plausible conjecture unenlightened reason had no power to aspire. To allay the tortures of conscience there was no "blood of sprinkling;" they knew of no "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." They had never heard the consolatory promise, "though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool;" or been taught "the blessedness of that man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." That Jesus Christ "came into the world to save sinners," was a mystery hid from their knowledge, and that the "kingdom of heaven is opened for all believers," was a truth far beyond their utmost powers of investigation. But, cheered by the doctrine of the atonement, the meanest Christian learns to "depart in peace," believing that, notwithstanding his frailties and his transgressions, his omnipotent Redeemer is still able and willing to "save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

It appears then, from the foregoing observations, that death-beds in general, may be reduced to four descriptions. The first is the case of those persons who die in tranquillity, but who ought, alas! if scripture be true, to have died far otherwise. Here we may discern the infidel, the hardened sinner, the ignorant, the self-righteous, and various other kinds of characters; in all of whom, however, want of knowledge, or want of faith, must have tended to produce this false security; for, would these unhappy persons have understood as they understand *now*, would they have believed as they *now* believe, assuredly no human artifice whatever could have lulled them to so fatal a repose.

The second class is the exact converse of the first, including numerous individuals of characters variously modified, but the hopes of all of whom, being really fixed upon a right foundation, ought to have been, we might have conceived, brighter and more satisfactory

than in the actual trial they perhaps appeared. Instances of this kind will sometimes occur, (as in the case of the poet Cowper,) for which it is not easy to account. We may, indeed, oftentimes discover, without much difficulty, the immediate cause; we may ascertain, for example, the existence of some malady or incorrectness of apprehension, but the ultimate design of the Almighty in so distressing an event, and the beneficial effect intended to be produced upon the sufferer, may not be quite so apparent.

But since it is evident, both from scripture and experience, that the death-bed of a consistent Christian is usually rendered a scene of comfort and composure, if not of positive delight, we may oftentimes discover, when an apparent exception occurs, that there existed some obvious cause quite adequate to the production of the effect. The Almighty does not contend with the Christian without reason. There had possibly been frequent or notorious lapses from the right path; some favorite sin had been indulged, some incorrect doctrine had been harbored, some secret fear of man, or dread of temporal disadvantage had prevented an explicit avowal of Christian principles. There had, perhaps, existed a culpable degree of ignorance respecting some important part of the gospel dispensation, especially those parts which relate to the believer's privileges and the freedom of salvation. Or, perhaps, repentance had not been sufficiently deep; self-renunciation was not impartial and unreserved; the flesh had not been sufficiently mortified; self-denial had not been duly practised; reliance by faith on Christ had not been sufficiently simple and implicit. There was some latent inconsistency, some unsubdued temper, some daily-besetting sin, some undue adherence to the world, some secret feeling of rebellion against God, to intercept the light of the divine countenance, and to blot out the fair face of the celestial world. Conversion, though genuine, was, perhaps, as Dr. Johnson remark-

ed of his own, *late;* the Holy Spirit had been often grieved; his influences had been long resisted; Christian virtues had dwindled and decayed; while earth-born principles and feelings had sprung up in all their native luxuriance, and impeded the growth of every heavenly implanted grace.

Still, however, in the majority of those cases in which faith, though weak, is really genuine, a light is at length seen to "spring up in darkness;" some indication occurs to prove that the last moments of such a person, though checquered with anxiety and distress, are yet, (even independently of the final result,) infinitely more blessed than those of the impenitent and unbelieving.

The third class consists of persons who have died unhappily, and who had apparently no scriptural ground for dying otherwise. It includes in its vast scope an indefinitely varying range of characters, from the ordinary sinner, who, dying, "makes no sign," to the Antichrist of Ferney himself, whose agonizing groans and execrations spoke—though how imperfectly!—the tortures of his departing soul. Here we may place also skeptics of that more common class, who fear eternity without believing in the scriptures, and who tremblingly expect a future state of rewards and punishments, without any trust in Him who alone "hath the keys of hell and of death." Infidelity may, indeed, boast that some of its disciples have met death with composure, and even cheerfulness; but, alas! who shall so balance between rival horrors as to decide whether the death of a Hume or a Voltaire is to be preferred; whether to quit the world in false repose, and "in hell to lift up one's eyes," be a better or a worse lot than to foresee and to shudder at the destruction which it is too late to avoid!

The fourth class consists of those who die happily, and whose happiness is well-founded. Of such persons several instances have been already brought for-

ward, nor is even the present age destitute of numerous witnesses to the power of the gospel in the hour of dissolution. There are, indeed, many motives for the true Christian's meeting death, not merely with acquiescence, but even with pleasure. The pious and amiable Melancthon was accustomed to console himself with the following reflections, which he recorded as some of the reasons why he himself should not be sorry to quit the present world: "Thou," said he, "shalt bid adieu to sin. Thou shalt be freed from cares, and especially from the rage of controversialists. Thou shalt enter into light. Thou shalt see God. Thou shalt behold also his Divine Son. Thou shalt comprehend all those wonderful secrets which thou couldst not understand in the present life. Thou shalt know why we are framed as we are. Thou shalt learn also the mystical conjunction of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ."

This holy man might have been justly mentioned among the preceding examples of persons who in their last moments, deeply felt and penitently confessed the guilt of their nature and their conduct, but who, amidst all, blessed God that Christ had become their Saviour and Redeemer. The passages of scripture which gave Melancthon most delight and comfort upon his death-bed, and which he was accustomed frequently to repeat, were chiefly those which speak of faith in Jesus Christ. The three following were among the number: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Whoso seek the Son and *believeth* on him, hath eternal life." "Being justified by *faith*, we have peace with God."

Thus fixing his hopes upon an immutable foundation, his aspirations after immortality became daily more fervid and intense. He appropriated to himself the words of St. Paul, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ;" and so completely was his mind en-

grossed by scriptural ideas, that he is said to have chaunted in his sleep, in the manner then customary at public worship, those affecting words of our Lord before his last supper: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Resembling our own Hooker in many important respects, he resembled him in this also, that the word *peace* dwelt upon his lips even in death. He adopted, as many pious men in every age have done, the exclamation of Simeon: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in *peace*, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Like Hooker, he had "lived to see the world made up of perturbations," and though both of these excellent men sacrificed much, and indeed every thing but their conscience, for peace, yet from the nature of the controversies in which they were engaged, neither of them had been permitted to enjoy it upon earth. But Melancthon was now about to enter that state "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." He was at peace with God through the reconciling blood of his Redeemer; he was at peace with his own conscience; and, as for the world, he was quitting at once its pleasures and its cares for evermore. He possessed all that he had long sought; his heart was full; and when asked by a friend if there were any thing more to be desired, he replied in that brief but emphatic exclamation,

ALIUD NIHIL—NISI CŒLUM!

THE

FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING.

COLOSSIANS, ii. 2.

To understand, to believe, and to enjoy, form the threefold attainment of the advanced Christian; and hence we meet in scripture with those remarkable expressions, "The full assurance of Understanding," "The full assurance of Faith," and "the full assurance of Hope." The infidel may in some measure comprehend the gospel, without believing its divinity; as condemned spirits believe its divinity, without enjoying its blessings. But the beatitude of the disciple of Christ consists in the threefold union of a *knowledge* which unfolds the doctrines of the Cross, a *faith* which admits their truth, and a *hope* which whispers that their promised blessings shall be his own.

Christian piety being a reasonable service, and springing not from the vivacity of the imagination, but from the legitimate use of an understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit to perceive what is right, and a will disposed by the same divine Agent to embrace it, must of necessity pre-suppose knowledge as a preparative for faith; for although, in various instances, faith is seen to consist with a considerable degree of ignorance, yet it never appears so exalted, so spiritual, and consequently so much resembling the full assurance of celestial intelligences, who drink immediately at the fountain-head of wisdom itself, as when it is grounded on an extensive view of the whole economy of redemption, in all its bearings and results. But while by the recognition of this truth we prevent that unnatural

alliance which superstition once thought fit to form between devotion and ignorance, we must guard infinitely more against that pride which would incite the enlightened but unimpressed professor of Christianity to value his speculative knowledge above the humble faith and ardent hope of the less intelligent disciple. A strong check to this pride is the reflection, that the knowledge of the one, however accurate or extensive, is but the ordinary result of the human understanding operating upon a system of speculative truths; whilst that of the other, though perhaps detached and circumscribed, evinces by the practical excellency of its effects, that it emanated from that divine Enlightener, "from whom all holy desires, all just counsels, and all good works do proceed."

Since, however, this doctrine though consistent both with reason and scripture, is opposed, not only to the ordinary pride of the human heart, but in an especial manner to the skepticism of an age in which supernatural agency is exploded as a "cunningly devised fable," it becomes necessary to view the subject more at large, and to show that the full assurance of understanding is a divine gift, and not a merely human attainment; a gift freely bestowed upon every ingenuous and humble inquirer, but withheld in equitable judgment from the presumptuous and insincere.

On this subject the Bible is our only guide; and to those who profess to believe its inspiration no other can appear necessary. What then is the testimony of revelation? Is it not laid down in terms too explicit for ignorance herself to misunderstand, or sophistry to evade, that "the world by wisdom knew not God;" that "the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God;" and that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

It is true, indeed, that the apostle in another place

asserts that the heathen had a sufficient idea of a Divinity to render them inexcusable in their wickedness; but even admitting that this knowledge might not be an immediate emanation from Him who never leaves himself without witness in the secret tribunal of conscience, or might not be a vestige of universal tradition, a reflected gleam of light on the mountains of error long after the luminary itself had set in darkness—still it was by no means that full assurance of understanding which would lead men to regard their Creator with earnest hope, unrivalled affection, and implicit confidence, and to aspire after that holy intercourse and communion with him for which man was originally created, and which religion teaches us to look for as the reward of glorified spirits in a future world.

Should it be objected that the above-cited passages relate merely to the *original* inability of man to have discovered the truths of revelation, but by no means imply, that those truths being once revealed and open to inquiry, any superadded assistance is now necessary in order to produce the full assurance of understanding, the objection may be obviated by other passages which not only imply the ignorance of man, but explicitly point out the agent of his illumination. "We have an unction from the Holy One," said the seraphic apostle St. John, "and know all things." Isaiah confidently predicted, "all thy people shall be taught of God." Our Saviour, in strict conformity with this prediction, promised that after his ascension the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, should teach his disciples all things; and St. Paul, relying on these assurances, did not cease to pray for his Colossian charge, that they might be "filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

It is edifying to observe how forcibly this doctrine of the divine teaching is inculcated in the formularies of the Established Church. The Collect for Whitsunday is particularly striking: "God, who as at this

time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort." Such was the language of our forefathers. Among the various errors in the scanty creed of modernized theology, the exclusion of the divine interposition is one of the most glaring. It cannot, however, excite wonder that those, who are insensible to the want of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter, should fail to acknowledge him as an enlightener and guide. But the true Christian, feeling his own weakness, and the strength and subtlety of his spiritual foes, perceives the value of the divine assistance; while therefore he "rejoices in the holy comfort" of the Spirit, he prays to him also for "a right understanding in all things." He is conscious that we can neither understand nor obey, without "the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will." To separate the commands of God from that proffered assistance which is necessary for their fulfilment, is to dislocate the whole system of Christianity. The injunction would be useless without the promised aid; but the aid is never denied where there is a sincere desire implanted to comply with the injunction. If we are exhorted "to work out our own salvation," it is immediately added, as a check to pride and an encouragement to exertion, that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Thus we are instructed equally to avoid self-sufficiency and spiritual sloth. We are not to sit contentedly in indolence, waiting for those influences which are promised to sincere exertion. The operation of the divine Spirit was never intended as a bar to the use of our natural faculties. Were a person to resolve, that, because he cannot attain the full assurance of understanding by his unassisted endeavours, he would never use any labour for that purpose, his infe-

rence would be as hostile to scripture as it is to natural reason. The Holy Spirit is unreservedly promised to "all that seek him." The evident means, therefore, of obtaining spiritual understanding is diligent exertion, accompanied with earnest prayer. Either by itself is not enough.

A principal cause, perhaps, why persons otherwise well disposed fail to perceive the reality of the Holy Spirit's work, is that they confound the agent with the means which he employs. A pious education, the intercourse of religious friends, the Christian ministry, the scriptures and devotional books, are not agents, but merely instruments, and "*means* of grace," and would be therefore wholly inefficient, but for the powerful interposition of Him who appointed them to accomplish his designs. How dim-sighted, then, alas, is man! from whom the thin veil of ordinances can conceal that celestial hand which directs them to their destined end!

From the preceding remarks it will appear that the acknowledged necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit as the illuminator of the understanding, is by no means a doctrine justly chargeable as superstitious, or tending to check the exertion of our rational powers. God *might* indeed produce, in a moment, the full assurance of understanding in a heathen who had never heard of the gospel; but he has been pleased, in the general course of his providence, to operate in a manner less apparently miraculous, employing and consecrating the faculties of the mind and the affections of the heart to produce the intended effect. The Creator is ever willing to teach as many as he makes desirous to learn; so that a failure to search into the doctrines of the Bible is a settled contempt of his Holy Spirit. It is not necessary, under the present circumstances of Christianity, that open displays of power, such as attended the conversion of St. Paul, should be daily seen to take place. The influences of the bless-

ed Spirit are not less real for being less ostensible. We should judge rather by the ultimate and permanent effect, than by the concomitant circumstances. The humble Christian, whose religious knowledge has been gradually and almost unconsciously acquired in his early years, till at length made effectual by a correspondent faith, will not less acknowledge the omnipotent hand of the divine Enlightener, than a converted heathen, on whose mind Christianity, like the tropical sun, has burst with almost instantaneous effulgence. The silent removal of a doubt, the imperceptible subjugation of a prejudice, even the secret implantation of a holy desire to examine into the question, if they ultimately end in salutary knowledge, prove themselves to be as much the operation of God as the most miraculous conversion recorded in the annals of the Christian Church. The influences of the Spirit are not less valuable or less efficacious when they gently "distil as the dew," than when they assume the most energetic and unexpected forms.

It may be urged, that if the divine influences be oftentimes so gradual and almost imperceptible, there can be no practical end attained by distinguishing them from the ordinary operations of the mind; for that the doctrine is but a metaphysical subtlety, and of no use in real experience. To this it might be a sufficient answer, that if the doctrine had not been of importance, it would not have been so carefully inculcated in the volume of revelation. Its practical tendencies are, however, singularly striking. It teaches humility and self-renunciation, by instructing us to attribute our religious attainments not to ourselves but to a higher source. It guards us against despair, and animates us in our Christian race, by pointing out to us divine assistance that is never withheld where it is devoutedly implored; while it collaterally proves that degradation of our nature which has made supernatural assistance necessary to enable us to perceive the glories of a system into

which pure spirits most ardently desire to look. In a word, it connects God with man, and teaches us to view ourselves, not as beings overlooked or forsaken, but as placed continually under the inspection of a Heavenly Parent, whose Holy Spirit is ever employed in enlightening our understandings and divinely influencing our affections.

These two operations are indeed more closely connected than the mere philosopher might be disposed to allow. A humble mind and devout affections are eminently serviceable, and even absolutely requisite, in attaining the full assurance of spiritual understanding. Our Saviour said, not that he who possessed the greatest powers of intellect, but he who wished to do the will of God, should know of his doctrine, whether it was of God, or whether he spake of himself.

To a divinely instructed mind, there shines forth a beautiful consistency in the doctrines of revelation. The fall and the atonement, the inability of man, and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, appear evidently intended to correspond. When man fell, he became darkened in his understanding, as well as depraved in his will: his intellectual faculties were obscured, as well as his moral powers deranged. Those things which he once intuitively understood became unknown. His Creator now appeared as a being involved in impenetrable mystery, and providence seemed a dark and inextricable maze. The tempter, while he hardened the heart, having also blinded the understanding, the first operation of the Holy Spirit is to remove the veil, and to restore man to his primeval faculty of spiritual perception. Hence the apostle says, that "the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." Every thing becomes new. Where is the proud being, wrapt in conscious dignity, who trusted to his inherent merit, and challenged heaven almost as a right? He is a penitent, humbly prostrate at the throne of mercy. He has

been taught the simple fact on which the whole system of Christianity is founded, namely, the sinfulness of man. Enlightened by divine instruction, he is surprised that he could so long have failed to perceive the meaning of texts of scripture the most evident and important. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." "The whole world lieth in wickedness." "There is none righteous, no, no one." "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" with various other passages of similar and equally decisive import.

This fact being once perceived, all things rise in proof for its confirmation; for what is the whole history of man, but a complicated tissue of weaknesses, imperfections, and crimes, which awfully illustrate and confirm the scriptural doctrine of our fallen state? Every thing around us proves that man is deeply polluted by sin. What are the pride, the sensuality, the irreligion, the raging passions of the great body of the world, but the effects of the general contagion? "*All* we like sheep have gone astray." Let us compare this description with real matter of fact. Let us turn, for instance, to the aged; to those whom experience has made wise, and who, being on the very brink of eternity, may be supposed to exhibit the most exemplary pattern. Delusive expectation! Fraud, avarice, unsubdued passions, callousness of heart, and confirmed habits of sin, are visible on every side. The love of wealth is usually their predominant passion; and upon the very precipice of the grave they stand counting their gold, heedless of death, who with rapid step silently approaches behind them, preparing to precipitate them into the tremendous gulf.

But these men, it may be said, are hackneyed in the ways of the world, and have become gradually contaminated by continual bad example. Let us then

turn to the bloom of childhood. Here we may, perhaps, discover minds untainted. Evil passions may here be unknown, and contagious example may not yet have produced its hateful effects. Purity and innocence, which have been exiled from the busy world, may here have found a congenial abode. Ah, no! nothing like it; the farthest from it possible. Every vice and passion exists here in embryo. Pride, obstinacy, revenge, selfishness, falsehood, are but a small portion of the vices evident at our first entrance.

But the refinements of society may make a difference. Turn then to the higher walks of life. Still the same scene, gilded indeed with wealth, and varnished with elegance, yet still substantially the same. Yet before we despair, let us behold the cottage of the peasant. This may possibly be a more innocent and heavenly spot. The contagion of cities and of courts may not have penetrated here, and the continual presence of the works of nature, and the simplicity of rural employment, may have given the mind a more celestial inclination. Vain expectation! The refinements of life may not indeed have found their way to so remote a scene; but sin, the universal guest, has obtained admittance. Here are all the vices of the higher ranks, without that thin veil of refinement, which, though it cannot render them less criminal, makes them at least less openly disgusting. Particularly we may observe profaneness, inebriety, theft, and that general brutality of character which is the natural consequence of sin. No rank, therefore, no profession, is free from the dire contagion.

The renovated understanding thus convinced of sin, cannot fail to observe those passages of scripture which threaten its punishment. These passages are of the most decisive and awful nature. "The wages of sin is death." "The wicked is reserved unto the day of destruction." "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men." "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest. This is the portion of their cup."

With those passages which thus speak of the sinfulness of mankind and the wrath of God impending over his head, the full assurance of understanding combines those also which point out his inability to procure pardon or justification in the sight of his Maker by his own merits and obedience. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." "If thou be righteous, what givest thou unto God, or what receiveth He at thy hands? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." "My goodness extendeth not unto thee." "There is none righteous, no not one." "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

But, while on the one hand the enlightened understanding thus contemplates

> "Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our wo,
> With loss of Eden,"

it perceives throughout the volume of inspiration mention made of "one greater man," who, by his obedience and death, should

> "Restore us, and regain the blissful seat."

This most animating and delightful doctrine appears conspicuously in every part of the Bible. "As by one man many were made sinners, so by one shall many be made righteous." "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

"He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us." "He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification."

The doctrines of the depravity and impotency of mankind, and the vicarious sacrifice and obedience of Christ being thus proved, the renewed understanding naturally proceeds to investigate the nature of the blessings procured by the atonement; and reposing upon the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit in its researches into divine truth, it cannot fail to obtain all needful information. Is man sinful and exposed to the divine wrath? Pardon is ensured. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Is the human heart by nature at enmity with God? Reconciliation and peace are obtained. "You that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Was man unrighteous and unholy? "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified." "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Was he exposed to the unutterable penalties of the second death? Jesus Christ "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." "He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him." "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; *therefore* are they before the throne of God."

The procuring cause of these inestimable blessings being thus ascertained to be the obedience and death of Christ, the method in which they are conveyed to the recipient naturally becomes the object of inquiry; nor will the scriptures conduce less to enlighten the mind on this than on the former points of investigation.

"We conclude," saith the Apostle, "that a man is justified *by faith*, without "the deeds of the law." Should it be asserted, (what cannot however be proved,) that Saint Paul intended only the ceremonial law, still this exalted grace will not hence be excluded from its office of justifying; for he expressly affirms, in another place, that "God shall justify both the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith." "By grace ye are saved *through faith*." "Whosoever believeth on Him, shall receive remission of sins;" but "without faith it is impossible to please God."

The full assurance of understanding will easily obviate the difficulty which appears, at first sight, in comparing those texts which speak of all men as naturally sinful and unholy, with those which declare that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," by referring to that renewal of heart, that implantation of a sacred principle, which is represented as making us "*meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." If man be naturally unfitted by sin for a world where nothing that defiles can procure admission, what can be more consistent with reason than that such a change should take place as is expressed in scripture by the terms *conversion*, *being born again*, and being raised to newness of life?

Should it be objected, that nothing more is intended by these expressions than what is necessarily conveyed in the Sacrament of Baptism, it would be easy to adduce various passages of scripture, which distinctly speak of the "renewing of the Holy Ghost," as well as the "washing of water;" of an inward and spiritual grace, as well as an outward and visible sign. But let us appeal to facts. Is it not a matter of notoriety that Baptism is not necessarily followed by holiness of heart or morality of life? Must not therefore some change be necessary which Baptism does not always convey? If a baptized person can become a deliberately wicked character, what alternative is there, but

either to give him up as beyond the reach of mercy, or to inculcate the necessity of conversion, that is, an entire renovation of heart, to make him meet for a world which an impenitent sinner cannot obtain and could not enjoy. The instructed understanding cannot therefore but perceive the doctrine of an entire mental transformation to be an important scriptural tenet, and will consequently acknowledge in the words of Divinity itself, that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The full assurance of understanding is conspicuous in reconciling two important articles of belief, which, by the unskilful and irreligious, are usually represented as in direct opposition; namely, the absolute freedom of salvation procured by Jesus Christ alone, and gratuitously applied to us by faith, irrespectively of human works or human merit, and the equally absolute necessity of that imparted "holiness without which we cannot see the Lord."

There are three common errors on this subject. The first, which imagines our supposedly good works to be the real ground of our acceptance with God, is confuted by Saint Paul, who teaches that "we are justified *freely by God's grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The second, which allows that justification may be obtained by a speculative faith unproductive of good works, is silenced by the pointed interrogation of Saint James, "Can *faith* save him?" The third, which combines the grace of God and our own works as co-efficients in procuring salvation, (a doctrine the most common, and not the least delusive of the three,) is refuted by that decisive passage, in which Saint Paul abundantly shows the impossibility of such a union: "If by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if of works, then it is no more of grace; otherwise work is not work." But the well-informed and well-disposed inquirer readily escapes these difficulties by viewing

the merits of Christ as the procuring cause, faith as the appropriating and uniting principle, and holiness, which is the generic term under which all good works as well as motives are included, as the necessary result. Widely differing from the self-righteous man, he asserts that our trust for salvation must be placed entirely on Christ's having suffered and fulfilled the law for us, while he explicitly denies the latitudinarian inference, that we are therefore emancipated from moral restraints. He views the Messiah as a Prophet, a Priest, and a Saviour; but he does not reject him as a Prince, a model, and a guide; a reformer of human manners, and a patron of moral excellence. While he perceives the indispensable necessity of faith, he does not forget that God observes actions as well as sentiments, and that Christianity is a regulator of the life as well as of the creed.

The preceding remarks are by no means intended to discourage the uneducated Christian, who laments his inability fully to comprehend the whole system of divine truth in all its harmonies and relations; especially since the expression, "the full assurance of understanding," refers, perhaps, upon the whole, rather to the certainty and stability, than to the extent of our spiritual comprehension. Knowledge may be limited, and yet be perfect in its kind. It is not for man, the being of a moment, accurately to survey with his feeble glance an edifice whose base is the whole world, and whose summit aspires beyond the third heavens: it is enough for him, if perceiving its utility, he be taught to shelter in it his defenceless head before the impending storm. The best informed Christian, as well as the most ignorant, must lament with the Apostle, "We see but in part and know but in part," and each has an equal claim to derive comfort from the subsequent declaration, that, "When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." The obvious and important inquiry is not so much

whether our knowledge be complete, as whether it be of the right kind ; whether it embrace the essentials of Christianity, and whether it evidence itself to be that "wisdom which cometh from above," by being "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." On subjects unimportant in themselves, or unimportant to us, it will be no diminution of our felicity to have been uninformed, especially if the consciousness of our ignorance teach us to aspire more ardently after those regions of light and knowledge, where doubt shall be lost in certainty, and probation be exchanged for reward.

It is important to remark, that the full assurance of Christian understanding is invariably accompanied with Christian humility. The arrogant dogmatists in the professing church of Christ, are usually those who have blindly moulded one half of revelation into a system, without regarding that other half, which would have taught them to modify or correct their premature conclusions. Nor is this observation unconfirmed by general experience in other sciences. The deep philosopher, who perceives the difficulties which encompass either side of his favourite system, is usually less arrogant than the mere sciolist who espouses the dogma without entering into the merits of the objection, and therefore ignorantly asserts what he cannot defend. Modesty and understanding should ever be combined in the Christian character. If the philosopher be taught self-diffidence, by knowing that every atom that floats in the sun-beam, every drop that sparkles in the ocean, may furnish questions which the most enlightened cannot answer, and difficulties which the most profound cannot solve, how much more the Christian, whose difficulties are greater in proportion as the subject which he attempts to investigate is more removed from the ordinary province of the human understanding. It is, indeed, as certain as it is consoling, that we

may, without difficulty, comprehend all that is necessary for our happiness here or hereafter; but those things which would only satiate our curiosity, without influencing our motives or regulating our actions, are wisely involved in undeveloped mystery. The full assurance of understanding, though it does not attempt to fathom those doctrines which are evidently among the "secret things which belong unto God," will, however, readily perceive the practical ends which they were intended to impress. If, for example, it cannot account for the introduction of moral evil into a world of holiness and felicity, it will be content to admire and adore that infinite wisdom which contrived out of it to educe good, and condescend to disclose in the volume of inspiration a remedy commensurate with the disease. If it cannot unfold the mystery of the Trinity, it will humbly submit to the scriptural statement, knowing it to have proceeded from God himself: it will believe the divinity of the three sacred Persons, and endeavor to become acquainted with them in their various relations to the Christian—thus deriving every practical benefit from the doctrine, without professing to unravel the difficulties with which it is surrounded. If the passing events of Providence, and the unaccomplished designs of futurity, appear confused and inexplicable, the renewed understanding is satisfied with ascertaining the consolatory fact, that "all things work together for good to them that love God, that are the "called according to his purpose," the government being for that end placed upon Him who "redeemed his church with his own blood."

But while the full assurance of understanding endeavours to trace in scripture the stupendous system of human redemption, it naturally proceeds to inquire into the exciting cause of such astonishing effects. Contemplating with wonder the exuberant streams of mercy, it ascends to their inexhaustible fountain, the infinite, the gratuitous, the immutable love of God, un-

folded in the person of his dearly beloved Son. But here the powers of the understanding sink beneath the delightful task. God is love!—Love ineffable! essential! unchangeable! Our views of Christianity cannot be said to amount to the plenitude of understanding, unless we are enabled to encircle every thing else with this golden chain which bounds and connects the whole. The heaven-taught mind will perceive this essential attribute of the Deity displaying itself from everlasting, in ordaining a remedy for the fall of man; in devising that immutable covenant, that "counsel of peace," by which the co-equal with the Father was to leave the right hand of the Majesty on high, to "take upon him the form of a servant, to be made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law," that "bringing many sons to glory," he might "see the travail of his soul and be satisfied." Inconceivable philanthropy! How does every idea of human merit and human pride fade away, while we gaze at this dazzling scene of divine mercy and compassion! How should the suavities of our bosom be enlarged and multiplied towards our fellow-creatures while we contemplate this mysterious, this unspeakable charity of our common Parent! Once arrived, in the full assurance of understanding, to the contemplation of so interesting a theme, there remains in scripture an exhaustless subject of devout meditation for the longest life. New excellencies will every day unfold themselves. The Christian advancing in divine knowledge resembles a mariner gliding down a river! at first the stream appears shallow, and he seems almost to touch the bank on either side; but as he proceeds it becomes deeper and wider, till at length he is lost in an ocean where his plummet can find no bottom, his eye can perceive no bounds.

THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

HEBREWS, X. 22.

It is important in studying the sacred volume, ever to retain in mind that it was not intended to be written with that systematic precision which is expected in works of merely human science. Without adopting the formality of mathematical discussion, it seemed fit to the Author of all Wisdom to inculcate in the course of epistolary, prophetic, historical, or devotional writing, the most important truths in the way best adapted for general instruction. Even in the more argumentative books, remote inferences, fervent appeals, sudden ejaculations, rapid transitions, followed often by a resumption of the subject equally rapid and unexpected, characterize the method of instruction adopted in the sacred writings. Human artifice is evidently discarded; so that amidst images and doctrines the most sublime, every thing partakes of a simplicity which banishes all idea of fraud or collusion. Partly, perhaps, owing to this free method of writing, and partly to the imperfection of human language, we often find in scripture the same word used in different acceptations; so that we are mercifully constrained to peruse its various parts, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," in order to form a perfect idea of almost any one subject. These observations are suggested by considering the different scriptural significations attached to the important word Faith, as used in the inspired writings. It stands not less for that supernatural principle which enabled Judas, though a wicked

man, to work miracles; for that transient feeling which supported Demas for a time, but could not prevent his ultimate relapse; and for that theoretical persuasion in Agrippa by which he believed the prophets,—than for that saving principle which actuated St. Paul and the most devoted converts of the primitive church. These significations, however, though distinct, are analogous, all implying in their elements a firm persuasion of certain truths, and differing chiefly in the mode, the duration, the agent, and the effects of that belief.

It is not an uncommon error to speak of faith as being little more than the simple result of the judgment exerted in deciding upon the evidences of Christianity. In its highest sense, however, it is a far more complex principle, including the operations of the understanding, the will, and the affections; comprehending every spiritual grace, and virtue, and displaying itself in acts and habits the most varied and distinct. Faith employs and concentrates *every* faculty of the soul. But however high its attainments, however wide its influence, it may be ultimately traced to its elementary principle, a belief in the divine inspiration of the holy scriptures. The chief danger is when to this elementary principle, this preparatory attainment, are attributed those saving effects which can arise only from a subsequent and superadded grace. Justifying faith, it is true, is founded on a recognition of the divinity of the Bible; but the mere recognition of its divinity, is not therefore justifying faith. It is indeed impossible to peruse the New Testament without perceiving that effects are attributed to this exalted grace which cannot be predicated of a mere speculative belief.

In persons of reflecting minds, it is highly conducive to the full assurance of faith during the future stages of their spiritual course, that they should have early examined into those outward evidences by which the divine inspiration of our holy religion is irrefragably prov-

ed. It often occurs that religious parents, while they properly inculcate on their children the necessity of faith in its highest signification, overlook the importance of teaching the outward evidences of Christianity. Unless therefore they become partakers of this heavenly grace, no motive remains but the influence of education or compliance with custom, for retaining even the forms of religion: whereas a persuasion of the truth of the Bible, grounded on rational evidence, is a permanent principle, and may keep the mind open to further conviction long after the honest prejudices of education are effaced.

The full assurance of *historical* faith may be easily attained in the due and humble use of the reasoning powers. Admitting the being of a God, it can be proved a possible case, that he should reveal himself to his creature man. The possibility being admitted, it will appear that it is also highly probable: for if man was intended to be left entirely ignorant of his Maker, to what purposes were the higher faculties of his soul created? Besides, might not many valuable ends be attained by such a revelation? Might not his morals, with which his happiness is evidently connected, be possibly rendered more consistent with right reason? Might not new motives be added to virtue, and new discouragements to vice?—a result which even an atheist, who professes to regard the well-being of society, must admit to be desirable.

Again—since it is evident that man has by nature a conscience, which often disturbs his happiness on the commission of a crime, by suggesting to him ideas of a superior Being, and perhaps foreboding something of a futurity, might it not be desirable, for many obvious reasons, that he should be furnished with more certain information on the subject? These, and similar reflections, will render the idea of a divine revelation by no means improbable. At this juncture, Christianity presents itself, and challenges investigation. Is

there any thing in it that previous to all inquiry renders it impossible or even improbable that it should have been a revelation from God; and which therefore presents a bar to further discussion? By no means; for it relates to subjects, which, if true, are highly important, and every way worthy to be revealed. What then are its evidences? Here a wide field of inquiry is laid open, from which no person possessing a sound judgment and a well-disposed mind could ever complain that he returned unsatisfied. What, for instance, can be more conclusive than a long series of minute prophecies, followed, many years after, by corresponding events? both which points can be fully proved by the unimpeachable faith of historical evidences. Where shall we seek for arguments stronger than the numerous miracles which are attested to have been performed; and that in the sight of persons rational and disinterested, many of whom may be proved to have written accounts of what they had witnessed, and to have suffered the most bitter torments, rather than retract their evidence? How again can we account for the acknowledged harmony existing between the numerous books that compose the sacred canon,—books written at long intervals of time, on subjects the most various, and infinitely above the unassisted powers of reason, and by persons of very different stations in life, (by prophets, by historians, by poets, by legislators, by fishermen, by mechanics, by kings,) without acknowledging them to have had some common source of information; and what source could there possibly be but the Divinity himself? The extensive diffusion of the gospel, (a system completely opposed to the natural pride and prejudices of the human mind,) in opposition both to the secular and the ecclesiastical power of every nation upon earth, is a fact for which nothing but supernatural assistance can account. But among such varied evidences, there is none perhaps more immediately striking than the present state of the Jews,

and its correspondence with scriptural predictions; a circumstance observable by all, and which infidelity itself can never explain away. To many minds, however, these obvious arguments are not more forcible than those minute correspondences, those unexpected corroborations, which diligence has discovered by comparing scriptural passages with each other, and with the works of contemporary authors.

A person unacquainted with the foregoing arguments, may obtain satisfactory evidence of a somewhat different kind. Observing that wise and good men, whose opinion he has been accustomed to regard with veneration, acknowledge the scriptures as the word of God, he has already a presumptive argument in their favor. This argument is greatly corroborated by his own examination. He sees the correspondence between scripture and matter of fact. Having observed the wickedness which appears in the world, (a state of things for which no uninspired author has ever been able to account,) he finds at the very commencement of the sacred volume the most satisfactory solution of the difficulty. He discovers in the Bible an exact and practical description of human nature, whilst the most boasted theories of philosophers are uniformly found inapplicable to real facts. Comparing his own heart with the delineations of it in scripture, he perceives a similarity which convinces him that none but the Searcher of Hearts could have drawn the picture. The character ascribed to the Deity, as a being infinitely potent, wise, equitable, holy, beneficent,—a character so evidently just, yet so widely differing from Pagan descriptions, confirms him in his belief. If there be difficulties, as undoubtedly there are, they are such as may be analogically proved to be very compatible with a divine revelation. The tendency of the whole system, even in a moral point of view, is evidently good, to make men wise, virtuous, and happy; which is a sufficient evidence in itself that it

orginated not in human fraud, much less in the suggestions of infernal spirits, but in the infinite source of benevolence and perfection itself.

A conviction grounded on evidence, is at all times a valuable Christian attainment; but especially so in an age of skepticism, and in seasons of great distress and unbelief. Oftentimes when the affections are cold and the will vacillating, the judgment retains its hold upon the divine evidence of Christianity, and thus helps to support the soul, when every thing else is for a moment lost. We may be plausibly tempted to view our other powers as subject to delusion, but we shall not so easily question the truth of what has been impartially demonstrated by our boasted faculty of reason; especially if having once determined the point, we keep the leading arguments ever present in our view. These remarks, however, by no means tend to deny the absolute necessity of "that unction from the Holy One," by which alone "we know all things;" they only suppose, what is undoubtedly true, that God may make use of the humble and prayerful exertions of our rational powers as a means of grace to confirm our faith.

But while the importance of a well-grounded historical belief is strenuously maintained, in opposition to the error of those who assert that Christianity cannot be proved by rational argument, it must never be forgotten that a much higher principle than a mere speculative or educational belief is necessary to render us true disciples of Jesus Christ. The evidences of Christianity are not Christianity itself. If they be important, as they certainly are, it is solely on account of the importance of the system to which they refer. Having therefore once attained a firm belief of the truth of the gospel, it becomes absurd to confine our attention wholly, or even chiefly, to this first principle: "Rather let us go on to perfection." Why content ourselves with surveying externally the walls and

buttresses of the edifice, when we are invited to enter and behold its interior beauties? Whilst the merely theoretic Christian is proving the gospel to be true, the practical believer is enjoying its blessing; having clearly ascertained that gold is to be found in the mine, he begins to dig in order to obtain it. The faith to which such high encomiums are attached in scripture, not only admits the Bible to be true, but feels it to be practically important. It perceives in the plan of redemption an incomparable excellence and congruity, which are of more weight than a thousand external arguments. It finds that the gospel comes home to the feelings and the heart. The blessings promised are realized. The experience of the soul corresponds with the conclusions of the understanding. All is rational, consistent, and agreeable to the evidence of fact. This kind of argument is highly satisfactory, and it is that which the Divine Spirit usually employs to build up the Christian in his most holy faith. It is not uncommon for persons to enjoy a high degree of faith, so as even to be willing to become martyrs for their profession, who know little of the external evidences of Christianity, and who depend for its truth chiefly upon its wonderful suitability to the condition of fallen man, and its more than natural influence on their own minds. Faith, it is indeed certain, is always grounded upon knowledge; but that knowledge may be often far less than the pride of intellect is willing to allow. The mind, gradually enlightened by the Holy Spirit, may have perceived at an early period of investigation, such internal marks of divinity in the scriptures, as shall possibly lead to the full assurance of faith long before they conduct to the perfection of knowledge. A considerable point is gained, when an inquirer, confessing and feeling the Bible to be the Book of God, determines unreservedly to admit and embrace its truths as they successively unfold themselves to his understanding. A person

thus humbly and piously disposed is in a state of mind infinitely more safe, and will arrive at the full assurance of faith far more certainly, than the most diligent collector of the mere evidences of Christianity. Knowledge, however, and faith are both desirable, and in ordinary cases increase together. They are twin-sisters, and the presence of the one usually pre-supposes or induces the presence of the other.

If further proof be wanted to show that Faith, as used in its higher significations in scripture, is far more than the bare admission of an orthodox creed, the effects attributed to it would decide the point. Saint Peter speaks of it as "purifying the heart;" Saint Paul calls it "the faith that worketh by love;" and Saint John asserts that it "overcometh the world." Now, is it not demonstrable by facts, that the principle which too often passes current in the present day for Christian faith, is totally inadequate to the production of these exalted effects? Are not the possessors of it oftentimes as impure, as worldly, and as selfish, as though purity, love, and conquest over the world, had never been recorded as characteristics of saving faith?

To the Christian grace under consideration is continually ascribed in scripture the office of purifying us in the sight of God; not however as being an intrinsically good work, or the conditional commandment of a remedial law, but as uniting us to Christ Jesus, and thus making us partakers of the benefits which by his obedience and death he procured for all that believe in his name. No fact is more conspicuous in scripture than that Christ suffered on our account, in order that "as by one man many were made sinners, so by one should many be made righteous." The being made righteous, or its synonyme *justification*, is an important blessing, implying not merely pardon, but a restoration to all our forfeited privileges as completely as if sin had never existed. The obedience of Christ is the procuring cause of this justification, but faith is the

means or instrument of its application to the recipient; for faith apprehends the Redeemer in all his relations to fallen man; and believing Him to be made unto us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," relies upon Him for these inestimable blessings. It appropriates and applies those doctrines which theoretical faith admits only as barren speculations. This observation may be illustrated by a slight review of the three well-known characters which our Saviour bears to the Christian, namely, his Prophet, his Priest, and his King.

As a Prophet, or teacher sent from God, the true believer not only acknowledges the authenticity of his mission, but sits humbly at his feet to receive his precepts. He learns the utter depravity of man, and his inability to merit heaven by the best obedience which since the fall it is in his power to bestow. He becomes acquainted with the necessity of that repentance and change of heart which our Saviour so earnestly inculcated when upon earth. He believes the divinity, the co-eternity, and co-equality of the three Divine Persons in the unity of the Godhead, because the Incarnate Word taught it, both personally, and by his followers under his unerring inspiration.

As a Priest, faith beholds the Messiah offering himself a sacrifice for sin, and thus procuring pardon and justification for all who should believe in his name. It conceives of this atonement as full, perfect, and satisfactory, to the exclusion of every thing else as the meritorious or procuring cause of redemption; and enables us to rely upon it fully for pardon and acceptance with God. To expect salvation in any other way than as penitent sinners, trusting wholly to the obedience and death of Christ, is to degrade him from his sacerdotal function. Saint Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews expatiates on this eminent character of the Messiah in a manner the most sublime and the most consolatory—the most impassioned, yet the most judi-

cious and edifying. Ineffably glorious are the scenes which he has unfolded to the eye of faith! He represents the second person in the Trinity, the co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, as consenting, by a divine agreement entered into from everlasting, to become "a great High-Priest," and "once in the end of the world" to appear "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." This covenant, in the fulness of time, was performed, and Christ Jesus was "made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High-Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Thus become incarnate, he "through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," and "being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." The sacrifice thus fully performed, and never needing to be repeated, he still retained "an unchangeable priesthood," in consequence of which "he passed into the heavens," "to appear in the presence of God for us." Having prayed and interceded for his followers when upon earth, he now mediates for them in heaven, and as a High-Priest offers up their prayers upon "the golden altar of incense." This doctrine of the intercession of Christ is embraced by faith as an important and consoling truth, from the consideration of which Saint Paul, in his usual method of deriving the most simple rules of practice from doctrines the most sublime, infers that we "should hold fast our profession," and "should draw near to God with a true heart, in *full assurance of faith.*" This heavenly principle therefore beholding Christ Jesus at the right hand of the Majesty on high, interceding on our behalf, teaches the Christian to offer up his prayers in holy confidence and hope, fully assured that his Heavenly Father is able and willing "to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," through the merits and intercession of our adorable High-Priest.

As a King, Faith receives his commands, and submits to his authority. It expels from the heart every rival power, so that religion becomes the unreserved allegiance of a willing subject. Devotion to God, displayed by a sincere and voluntary, though imperfect, obedience to his will, whether as relating to our creed or our practice, is a necessary result of the full assurance of faith. The gospel thus provides in an effectual manner for good works, by implanting a holy and active principle in the mind which cannot fail to produce them; while it sets aside pride, by making our salvation due, not to them, but entirely to the merits of Christ. The doctrines of "the cross of Christ" are eminently adverse to human vanity. Salvation is represented as entirely an act of grace.

To renounce ourselves,—to conquer all the natural ideas of the fallen mind relative to the attainment of heaven,—to trust to the mercy of God conveyed to us solely through Jesus Christ, not for any worthiness in ourselves, but gratuitously on account of his own sovereign favor and loving-kindness,—to rely as humble penitents upon the Saviour of mankind for the application of his obedience and merits to us, as our claim to pardon, justification, and eternal glory, with a firm belief that such reliance will not be in vain,—all this, however difficult, however apparently humiliating, however opposed to the natural suggestions of the unrenewed mind, seems to be included in the scriptural idea of the assurance of faith. It cannot therefore excite wonder that so exalted a principle should suppose as exalted an Agent, or that an apostle should in consequence affirm, that "faith is the gift of God." Ignorance may vaguely depend upon the divine mercy, because it does not perceive the heinousness of sin, or estimate aright the justice of God in decreeing its punishment:—presumption may arrogantly hope to obtain heaven, because it magnifies our supposed excellence, and extenuates our real guilt, till it has formed such a

character as it imagines deserves the Creator's approbation; but for the humble penitent, feeling and acknowledging on the one hand his inherent depravity, his actual transgressions, and his utter unworthiness, (all which will appear more aggravated as his repentance is more profound,)—and perceiving on the other the infinite holiness and inflexible integrity of the Creator, who has inseparably appended misery to sin, —for a person thus penitent and thus instructed, possessing a tender conscience with an enlightened understanding, to enjoy the full assurance of faith, is a paradox, resolvable only on the principles of the Christian revelation. Faith and hope thus implanted where, humanly speaking, despair appeared inevitable, evince themselves to be indeed "the gift of God."

It is not unusual, when the necessity of faith is mentioned, to subject oneself to a reproof, as if the importance of good works had been denied; a supposition both ungenerous and unjust. Even could it be proved that the doctrine of justification by faith is hostile to morality, this fact could not efface that doctrine from the Bible, where it appears in characters indelible by human artifice; but it would furnish an argument much stronger than any that has ever been yet suggested, against the divine inspiration of that volume. No method therefore of defending the honor of Christianity can be more injudicious than merging or softening down the doctrine of justification by faith in order to inculcate, as we suppose, more forcibly, the necessity of good works. It is the most candid, and indeed the most judicious method, boldly to meet the supposed difficulty, without endeavoring by forced constructions to steal from the sacred volume a doctrine, which, after all our efforts, will still appear too conspicuously to be concealed.

But, in reality, what difficulty is there in the subject, when it is expressly allowed that where there is not morality and obedience there cannot possibly be

faith? It is not a dead faith, but a holy and efficacious principle, which is contended for. Faith, it is true, operates immediately upon the understanding, the affections, and the will; but is it therefore hostile to outward correctness of conduct? Does holiness of heart necessarily preclude morality of life? Cannot a converted penitent believe that his sins, though many, are pardoned through the obedience of his surety, without consequently feeling a desire to renew them? Is it not even possible that he may have so completely felt the wretchedness, the folly, and ingratitude, as well as the impiety of a sinful life, that a return to it would not be an emancipation but an intolerable slavery?

Cleanse the fountain, that the streams may be pure, is the dictate of wisdom. If good works be necessary or desirable, as undoubtedly they are, begin with the sources of action. "Out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," and every other crime; the heart therefore must be purified, if the conduct is to be reformed. Now is not the purifying of the heart expressly mentioned by Saint Peter, in the Acts of the Apostles, as the property of faith? Any principle short of this would have produced only a partial and perhaps transient effect. But that which sanctifies, not merely the conduct, but the heart, becomes universal in its influence. Nothing can interfere with its operation. A pebble thrown into the current agitates not the fountain-head; but if the fountain-head be agitated, the current necessarily becomes disturbed. Why then in religion alone should men be censured for beginning with the beginning? Why when they attempt to inculcate a "religion of motives," should they be censured as vindicating licentiousness of conduct? Good works are confessedly indispensable, but faith is the germ from which they must spring. Holiness, from which good works necessarily flow, is essentially connected with justifying faith. We are as

much said to be "sanctified in Christ Jesus," as to be justified by his merits and obedience. A principle which purifies the heart causes war with all that is immoral in the life; so that where faith exists, a divine sanctity pervades the soul, rendering us "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," and producing in the conduct "whatever is lovely and of good report."

Again, faith "worketh by love." Its origin, its tendency, its end, are congenial to the most amiable dispositions of the soul. It involves nothing austere or terrific in its operations. It wields not the torch of the inquisitor, or the lash of the self-tormenting devotee. Its "Author and Finisher" is the glorious and gracious Being who is emphatically denominated "Love." Aspiring towards its source, it teaches us to "love him because he hath first loved us." Hence faith, working by love, incites to a cordial and filial obedience to his commands, and thus affords the strongest pledge for morality and good works. Duty becomes pleasure, obedience a delight. But whilst God is honored, mankind also is benefited; for the humble penitent, gratefully remembering that Christ died for him, will remember that he died not for him alone. The being partners in the same misfortune and the same remedy becomes a new source of attachment to our species. Faith, therefore, while it "worketh by love," in elevating the soul in devout affections to our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, operates no less in benevolence towards all mankind. It prompts us to love God, but we cannot do this without loving our brother also. The circles are distinct, but they are concentric, and we cannot embrace the larger without including the less. The Messiah comprised the whole law in two commandments, neither of which is ever kept where the other is disregarded. True faith honors both. The apostle teaches us that of the three cardinal graces of our holy religion, the greatest

is charity; by which he undoubtedly means a principle of love to God followed by love to man, and prompting to every exertion and every sacrifice in the cause both of our Creator and of human kind. Charity therefore must be applauded as the highest of Christian graces; but charity, it must never be forgotten, is the daughter and the inseparable companion of Christian faith.

It is by no means a subject for surprise that, persons accustomed to understand by the word Faith a vague inoperative principle, a merely speculative or educational assent to a system of religious truths, should exclude it from the important office of justifying, or should ask in the well-known, but often-perverted words of St. James, "Can faith save him?" Justification is indeed a blessing of such inestimable value, that too much caution cannot possibly be exerted in determining the mode of its attainment. It is readily acknowledged, that if a mere recognition of the truths of religion, a barren faith teaching us to call Christ "Lord, Lord," without doing his will or walking in his steps, were the instrument of justification, the utmost injury would accrue to the sacred interests of morality. But when the case is widely different, when the heavenly principle, to which the office of justifying is attached, is one producing every result which the moralist can desire, we need fear no danger from the assertion of St. Paul, that "a man is justified by faith." The faith of the Christian is the fruitful parent of all that is excellent both in the heart and life. The Apostle John incidentally furnishes us with the two premises of a syllogism which undeniably shows how incompatible are faith and immorality. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God;" the conclusion from which is irresistible, that whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ doth not commit sin, at least habitually and with a willing

consent. Both Saint Peter and Saint Paul, in speaking of the all-sufficiency of faith, guard their doctrine from abuse by alluding to one or more of its essential properties, in order that their converts might not boast of an inefficient creed while their hearts and conduct were unrenewed. Faith, that purifieth the heart and worketh by love, could not easily be supposed to mean a mere barren assent to the truth of Christianity.

Among the characteristic properties of faith there is no one more remarkable than that mentioned by Saint John, and to which allusion has been already made, namely, that it "overcometh the world." It is evident from universal experience, that no other principle can produce this effect. Faith, however, performs it by a mode of operation peculiar to itself; by presenting to the view things that are invisible, and showing their great superiority to the vanities of time and sense.—The reason why men prefer this world to that which is to come, is not that their judgment is convinced, but that their passions are allured. Heaven is allowedly the greater object, but it is distant and invisible: whereas the world is ever at hand with its fascinations. It assumes every shape, addresses itself to every passion, obtrudes into every recess. We are never free from its influence. Whatever we see around us is the world; and if we look into our own hearts, the world and worldliness are triumphant there. The voluptuous man worships it in the shape of pleasure; the covetous, of gold; the ambitious, of honour; the retired, of ease. It dwells in cities; but, not confined to these, it seeks the lonely retreat, it enters the temple of the Almighty, it intrudes into the closet of the most heavenly-minded Christian. Persons the most unlike in every other respect are here equally enslaved. The profligate and the moralist, the infidel and the ostentatious devotee, are under its influence. Business and pleasure, pride and pretended humility, sensual and

intellectual enjoyments, all partake more or less of the world.

An object thus prepossessing, and thus obtrusive, must of necessity influence our minds, unless something more important be introduced. "Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It brings heaven nigh. It antedates eternity. It prevents the unhallowed intrusion of the world by pre-occupying its place, and presenting to the mind objects infinitely more important, and which are overlooked only because they are remote and spiritual. Upon every earthly scene it inscribes, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity;" while it invests every thing relating to a future world with inconceivable importance. Men in general view heaven as a dream and earth as a reality, and their conduct corresponds to their perceptions; but faith reverses the scene, and thus "it overcometh the world." It presents motives to duty more forcibly than the highest temporal considerations, whilst it assures us of that divine encouragement and support which alone can enable us to surmount every impediment. This is a double influence, and is not easily counteracted.

St. Paul illustrates his definition of faith by numerous examples. He represents Moses, for instance, as surrounded with the world in its most attractive forms. He possessed the pleasures, the affluence, and the wisdom of Egypt, and was presumptive heir to its crown. These were objects visible and tangible; but faith weighed them in the balance of the sanctuary, and found them lighter than nothing and vanity, so that he in consequence "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense of the reward." Faith was thus "the evidence of things not seen."—The Apostle continues to exemplify his position by a glorious "cloud of witnesses," proving to the Hebrews that faith in the expected Messiah had enabled their

forefathers to overcome the world in its most varied forms. Its blandishments and its tortures were equally impotent: pleasures could not seduce their affections, nor pain overcome their constancy. The inference he deduces is, that we, who enjoy greater information, and have witnessed the coming of Him whom they only expected, should imitate their example, and "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

In the present day, we have not indeed those appalling difficulties to overcome with which the apostle and his contemporaries were environed: but the world is an enemy ever present, an enemy that must be hourly opposed, but which can never be conquered but by the same principle which enabled so many of the primitive Christians to become martyrs for the cause of their Redeemer. Saint John triumphantly inquires, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Surely no one. All other men are its slaves and willing captives. It never even occurs to them that they are required to overcome it; or that its "pomps and vanities" are to be renounced by the express letter of their baptismal engagements. On the contrary, they lament that they cannot revel more fully in its enjoyments. If any new species of worldly gratification be invented, they long to taste its delights. The man who possesses most of the spirit of the world, and has drunk deepest of its poisoned chalice, becomes an object of admiration and envy; while the Christian, who has in any considerable measure lived up to the spirit of his baptismal vows, is regarded with mingled hatred and contempt.

But what, it may be asked, is the nature of that world which faith teaches and enables us to overcome? The "beloved apostle" speaks of it as comprising "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

The first of these is subdued by really believing that "our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost," and

constantly calling to mind, that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world."

The second, which includes every kind of covetousness, is not less a characteristic of the world than the former. If we use illicit means to procure riches, if we covet our neighbour's possessions to increase them, if we sacrifice to them that time and attention which ought to be devoted to our Creator, if we love them inordinately, if we dispose of them merely for our personal gratification, without considering the important purposes for which they were sent, we are among those unhappy persons described by Saint Paul, who, not perceiving that "the love of money is the root of all evil," "*have erred from the faith*, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." The full assurance of *faith* would evidently have prevented these unhappy effects.

The third characteristic of the world is "the pride of life," which no principle short of true faith can effectually subdue. Pride, we might almost imagine, was that fabled Proteus which sprung up in a new form after every apparent conquest,—that hydra which multiplied sevenfold as often as wounded,—that Antæus which could never be conquered on his native earth. The man of business is often proud of his skill, the man of family of his honors, the vigorous of his strength, the affluent of his riches, the learned of his talents, the elegant of his accomplishments; nay, often the Christian himself of his spiritual graces and attainments. But faith abases pride, by pointing out Him, "who, being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God," yet "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Pride shrinks away from a sight like this. The characteristic of Christian faith is Christian humility. The man of piety views himself as a being fallen from the state of dignity and happiness in which he was created, into an immeasurable gulf of sin and misery. His passions, his transgressions, his ignorance, his corrupt affections, his unhallowed will, the temporal and eternal punishment which he deserves, contrasted with the unmerited mercies which he has received, and the still greater, which through the merits of his Saviour he expects, all tend to create deep self-abasement and humility. "Pride was not made for man."

It is remarkable, how completely this description of the things which are in the world, and which faith is required to overcome, seems to include many of the most fashionable amusements of the present age. If any diversion, however specious the forms it may assume, (forms, perhaps, so specious as oftentimes to gain it admission into families otherwise moral and exemplary,) tend in any manner to inflame the sensual passions, to foster or gratify the insatiable cupidity of the selfish heart, or to encourage that pride of life which religion so severely condemns, it is surely included under those things which faith may and ought to overcome. Whether scenic amusements and public assemblies be not usually conducted in such a way as to bring them under both the first and third of these characteristics, may deserve inquiry before we venture to join in them. Gaming, in all its forms, is evidently included in the second. A man who enjoys the full assurance of faith, cannot possibly delight in unhallowed pleasures. The spirit and the temper of his mind are at variance with them. If any amusement be undertaken with a view to our health or innocent recreation, it cannot be unlawful, so long as we find it does not unfit us for our duties to God and our neighbour; so long as it does not encroach on moments that should

be better employed, and does not indispose the mind for meditation, prayer, and self-examination; but if any one of these effects arise from our partaking in any diversion, either the diversion was sin in itself, or was pursued to an inordinate excess, both which render us criminal in the sight of God. Were we always to live in the full assurance of faith, the most trivial occurrences of life would be consecrated by its influence; but "whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" so that every pursuit on which we cannot consistently expect the divine blessing becomes a crime. The true Christian desires not any stronger argument against questionable amusements than the words of Saint John—"these things are not of the Father, but of the world." To him who desires to live up to the spirit of his baptismal engagements, this apostle could urge no stronger objection against the world than that it is worldly; as Saint Paul, in describing the malignity of sin, says only that it is "exceeding sinful."

To a person just beginning to yield himself up to his Creator, the world is a most formidable enemy; for his faith, though genuine in kind, may not yet be sufficiently matured to effect so great a conquest as is implied by victory over the world. Struck with a sense of our real interest, and feeling the unparalleled importance of eternity, we resolve for a moment to profess ourselves decided followers of Christ, and desire to live up to our holy profession; but too soon the impression is obliterated, and the discarded syren, with her allurements or her frowns, regains us to herself. Such is her influence, that if she cannot fascinate, she overpowers; if she cannot make sin appear smiling and agreeable, she equally succeeds by representing holiness as terrific and austere. We dare not be different from the majority of heedless beings around us, although we believe our salvation depends upon the issue. We sacrifice our souls for the sake

of fashion, and prefer the broad way that leadeth to destruction, because it is the common custom among our associates to walk in it.

As the world is one of the first enemies which Christian faith has to encounter, so also it remains one of the last. It clings to our dying pillow. It interposes between us and heaven. Faith may have overpowered our natural fear of death and dread of futurity, long before it has completed its conquest over this versatile enchantress. If, however, we do not find that terrestrial scenes become daily less important to us; that the world with its opinions, its pleasures, and its possessions, is sinking in our view—that eternity, as it approaches nearer, becomes more interesting, while the objects of time and sense relinquish their hold upon our heart,—we may be assured that we do not possess that full assurance of faith, whose essential property it is to overcome the world. Faith, however, by no means resembles that romantic sickliness of fancy, that feverish discontent, that cherished melancholy of poetical feeling, which not only render their possessor dissatisfied with the present scene, but also disqualify him for performing his duty in it. The heavenly grace under consideration is practically *beneficial* in its influence. It does not terminate in gloomy reverie and self-absorption. While it shows that our time will not be long, the conclusion which it derives is not that we may therefore be idle, but, on the contrary, must be doubly vigilant and active. It evidences its sense of the importance of eternity, not by neglecting the duties of time, but by a diligent and conscientious discharge of them; knowing that a world of probation, though transitory and unsatisfying in itself, is awfully momentous in its connexion with the everlasting realities of a future state, especially at that solemn crisis when we shall be judged "according to the deeds done in the body."

To remarks of the preceding nature it is often ob-

jected, that the state of mind spoken of as constituting the operation of Christian faith, is but one among the many modes of factitious excitement,—a mere delusion, engendered and fostered by a well-disposed but credulous imagination, and by no means encouraged by the cool and rational spirit of the gospel. If this objection be admitted, in what way shall we account for the continual recurrence in scripture of such ideas as the following :—walking by faith, living by faith, standing by faith; of being purified by faith, sanctified by faith, justified by faith; of Christians being mutually comforted by faith, of having access to God by faith, of Christ's dwelling in men's hearts by faith, with various other expressions of similar import? Does the sacred canon describe as real and essential, what is but visionary and delusive? Far from it. If therefore Saint Paul avowed that "the life which he lived in the flesh he lived by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him," it is surely not enthusiastic to expect a somewhat similar, though perhaps less remarkable experience, in all who profess the same unchangeable religion.

Faith then is a divine grace, produced externally by the truths of the gospel,—not however as the efficient, but the instrumental cause,—and internally by the teaching of God the Father and the Holy Ghost.—Without it "we cannot please God." When matured to full assurance, it produces the most celestial effects. "Looking unto Jesus," its author and finisher, it enables us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us." It prompts us to emulate that glorious company of saints, confessors, and martyrs, "of whom the world was not worthy;" but who obtained so "good a report *through faith*." It teaches us, in the spirit of self-renunciation, implicitly to rely upon God as "a faithful Creator." From this moment, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Beyond the valley of the shadow of death the eye of faith perceives

a heavenly light breaking forth, and gradually increasing to the perfect day. Surrounded with clouds and darkness here, the Christian beholds an unsetting sun beaming on the distant hills beyond the grave. If mortality can boast of happiness, it is the lot of that man who, ready to depart, forgetting a world which had proved itself unworthy of his affections, and looking forward towards his native home, can in the confidence of his faith assert with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" or exult with the apostle of the Gentiles, who, in the near prospect of dissolution, his heart glowing with rapture and melting with divine love, could exclaim, in a voice already attuned to the music of the third heavens, "I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day." This was the triumph of the gospel; the full assurance of Christian faith. Theoretical religion, a mere orthodox creed, could never have exalted the apostle to so sublime, so enviable a height of gratitude and adoration.

When the moment comes in which the writer and the reader of these pages, with all their relatives and friends, and contemporaries, must yield their present stations to a succeeding race, what more glorious epitaph can they desire than the apostle's most emphatic words,

"THESE ALL DIED IN FAITH."

THE FULL ASSURANCE OF HOPE.

HEBREWS, vi. 11.

THE Christian's highest attainment is the full assurance of hope. Faith is the principle that points out the all-sufficiency of Christ Jesus for our salvation, and unites us to Him; but the well-assured expectation of glory which succeeds this union is more correctly denominated hope than faith. The functions, however, of these two divine graces are oftentimes so blended, that it is not easy to draw the exact line of demarcation between them; so that what is predicated of the one might in many cases be applied with equal propriety to the other.

Christian hope may be defined *a heavenly and well-grounded expectation of salvation and eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, in the method propounded in the gospel.*

It is *heavenly*, both because it emanates from God, and because it tends towards him. God is called the "God of hope," and is said to have given the Christian "a good hope through grace." The principle, thus celestial in its origin, is not less so in its tendency. Rising above the mists that hover round sublunary scenes, it aspires after the invisible source of beatitude and perfection. Its language is, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee." Christian Hope is further defined to be *well-grounded*, in opposition to the presumptuous hope of the Pharisee, the delusive

hope of the hypocrite, and the vague dependence of the careless and uninformed. It is *expectation*, as distinguished from perception; for "hope that is seen is not hope." *Salvation and eternal glory* are mentioned as its objects, in order to distinguish it from human and worldly expectations; for although it is the exclusive privilege of the Christian that he has "the promise of the life that now is," as well as "that which is to come;" yet his hopes being conversant almost entirely with objects spiritual and eternal, he learns to view every thing else as subordinate; and would be willing to sacrifice every outward enjoyment, and to sustain every outward misery, for the hope of the prize of his high calling. Lastly,—Christian hope can exist only through Christ Jesus, who is expressly entitled "our hope," and can be truly derived only in the method propounded in the gospel, by faith in his name.

If the preceding definition be correct, no principle that is human in its origin, or worldly in its tendency, that rests on false or insufficient grounds, or that expects salvation in any way but solely through the merits of Christ Jesus in the scriptural method, by a true and lively faith, can fairly claim the title of Christian hope.

In meditating on this exalted principle, three obvious considerations occur to the mind, namely, its nature, its effects, and the means of its attainment and increase.

To comprehend the *nature* of Christian hope, it is necessary to consider both the sublimity of the objects which it embraces, and the immutability of the basis on which it rests.

Among the *objects* of the Christian's hope, the first is pardon of sins. The magnitude of this blessing will conspicuously appear from the various considerations which naturally rendered it of improbable attainment. Was not our forefather and federal representative forewarned, and was he not endued with power to stand? What reason then could there be to hope that the omnipotent and infinitely just Being, whom he had

offended, would, under these aggravated circumstances, condescend to provide a remedy? Is not the gleam of hope still farther darkened by considering, that the only way in which the wisdom of God saw fit that sin should be pardoned must be by the incarnation and death of his co-equal and well-beloved Son? Both the infinite price of redemption, and man's unworthiness of it, conspired to render it a hopeless blessing. If to this we add our own personal demerits, our continued, our multiplied, our aggravated transgressions, our sins committed against light and against knowledge, against the remonstrances of God's Spirit and the precepts of his word, taking also into our view the unbending justice and unimpeachable veracity of the Creator,—we shall perceive the pardon of sin to be no ordinary benefaction.

But Christian hope, being commensurate with Christian faith, looks still higher, expecting not only pardon, but justification; that is, a complete and satisfactory acquittal, an oblivion of every charge against us, and a re-investiture in all the original but forfeited privileges of our once happy primogenitor. Hence this animating principle, though far from attempting to veil the malignity of sin, or furnishing motives for its encouragement, yet being grounded on a sense of the immeasurable love of God and the infinite value of the Redeemer's sacrifice, looks forward, even in this world, to the highest blessings. It humbly expects unfailing supplies of grace in the due use of all appointed means, with new and continual accessions of knowledge, of faith, and of holiness. Amidst all the inherent weaknesses of the Christian, and the spiritual enemies which would, if possible, pluck him from his Redeemer's hand, hope teaches him to expect the preserving mercy of God to keep him in his arduous course, assured that whom the Heavenly Parent loveth he loveth unto the end. Faith having once credited the astonishing assertion of the apostle, that "all things work together

for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose," the map of providence, even in its darkest shades, instantly becomes illumined with the cheering rays of hope. "All things!" Deprived of health and friends, of the comforts and conveniences of life—enough will still remain. Hope builds upon the universality of the proposition. We perceive not the mysteries of futurity; but hope, mingled with faith, includes them all in the glorious catalogue of blessings. Every moment, as it glides by upon its silent pinion, appears commissioned to perform an errand of mercy. Nature, pursuing her appointed course, is unconsciously producing the intended effects. Even losses, afflictions, and persecutions, unexpectedly concur in the general design. Enemies involuntarily become friends; and hope, instead of wantonly lacerating her feet with the briars that infest her path, contrives from every thorn to pluck a flower. Even temporal mercies, though but of secondary importance, are anticipated by her upon the faith of that consoling promise, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Christian hope has its highest triumph where natural hope entirely fails. It embraces objects unseen and eternal. It extends beyond the grave. "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." Faith having taught us that we must rise again, hope anticipates a resurrection unto happiness. It expects the moment when our "vile body shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body," and when, invested with the garment of the Redeemer's righteousness, we shall be found "perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Already hope hears the thrilling accents, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Heaven from that moment begins. The great object for which the world was created is accomplished. Fallen man has arrived at the

portals of the celestial world, and has begun to enjoy the unclouded presence of his Creator. The glory of God, to which human felicity was intended to be subservient, is now complete.

Hope, in looking forward to these ineffable scenes, expects infinitely more than she can conceive. She limits the anticipated joy by nothing but the power of the Creator to bestow, and the glorified spirit to contain. Where the full assurance of hope exists, how intense oftentimes are the aspirations of the soul after the expected bliss! Terrestrial objects begin to pall upon the sense, except when taken in their important reference to eternity. Nothing but eternity can fill the expanded soul. Fallen as mankind is, his powers are still too noble to be satisfied with any thing that earth can afford. Saint Paul prayed for a blessing, nothing less than that his Ephesian converts might be "filled with all the fulness of God." From the death-bed of the expiring Christian, methinks I hear the alternately soft breathings and rapturous anticipations of the heaven-born principle of hope. "When shall this mortal put on immortality? Why, O Lord, are thy chariot wheels so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of thy chariots? When shall this thirsty soul drink at the fountain-head of the river of life, the streams of which eternally make glad the city of God? Roll swiftly on, ye lingering moments, and bring me to my eternal reward. Vanish, ye interposing clouds, that veil from my mortal gaze my Redeemer's throne. How brightly does eternity begin to dawn upon my parting soul! Even now I behold the distant shores to which I am hastening. Already they appear illumined with celestial radiance. The past is forgotten. The vanities of time gone! Nothing remains but the remembrance of the mercy and the truth which have followed me all my days. God hath been my guide even unto death, and will shortly become my portion forever. Mine eyes shall see the King in his beauty,

they shall behold the land that is very far off. Every tear shall be wiped away. The wicked shall cease from troubling, and the weary shall be at rest. The disappointments of life are over, and shall never recur. All is now certainty and repose. My Redeemer hath triumphed over death and hell: he hath led captivity captive, and hath insured the victory even to me, the weakest of his followers. All things are mine, whether 'the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come;' all are secured to me by the same unalterable tenure which secures them to my almighty Redeemer; for I am Christ's, and Christ is God's. How do earthly delights shrink into nothing in comparison with the glories of eternity! What equivalent can life, with all its boasted enjoyments, afford for the unclouded presence, the beatific smile of Him, 'whom, having not seen, I love; in whom, though now I see him not, yet believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?' Every thing short of this is less than nothing and vanity. But *this* will satiate the most enlarged desires of my soul. Then shall I be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness."

Such are the anticipations that oftentimes fill the bosom of the dying Christian! Such is his foretaste of the glory that shall follow! But, look again—the last sigh has escaped, and hope has winged her eager way to scenes where she is forever lost in divine fruition.

If then Christian hope be a principle embracing such illimitable objects of enjoyment, it becomes highly necessary to inquire into the stability of the basis on which it rests. It is no common foundation that can support so vast an edifice. Were human merit or human promises our ground of expectation, we might be eventually obliged to exclaim with Job, "My hope hast thou removed like a tree." But the trust of the Christian, being founded upon the immutable promises of Him who cannot falsify or retract, is in-

finitely more stable than any earthly confidence. The power of the promiser being supreme, his beneficent intentions cannot be frustrated; from which consideration the apostle of the Gentiles was accustomed to derive the highest satisfaction. "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is *able* to keep that which I have committed unto him." The eternal hills shall sink away, the sun shall forget to run his diurnal course, earth shall be dissolved, and all the starry worlds which adorn the brow of night be blotted from existence; but while Deity itself shall survive, the hope of the Christian is secure. The omnipotence and unimpeachable truth of the sacred Trinity are combined with unbounded love and mercy in support of the believer's expectation. Our trust, the apostle affirms, was made to rest upon "two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie," in order "that we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us in the gospel." These two immutable things, therefore, namely, the promise and the oath of the Eternal, are irrevocably pledged in behalf of all those who are included in the character described. It is consoling to know that the promises of God are confirmed in Jesus Christ; that "in him they are all yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." Saint Paul therefore expressly entitles the Messiah, "the Lord Jesus Christ our hope." No pledge could possibly be stronger, or convey more forcibly to our weak minds, (what, however, would have been equally true though no pledge had been given,) the immutable nature of the divine promise. No pledge, it is asserted, could have been stronger; for "if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" A promise sealed with the blood of the incarnate Son of God is solemn and inviolable. The obedience of Christ being complete, to the exclusion of every thing human as the

meritorious cause of salvation, the promised blessings will not, cannot be withheld from any who answer to the character described. Unchangeable veracity, almighty power, and godlike beneficence, all concur to forbid such an idea. We may even conceive that our Heavenly Parent beholds with sacred complacency the hope which he himself has implanted ; a hope springing from him as its source, tending towards him as its end, and embracing as its objects those eternal realities which he himself hath taught us to desire.

Such then is Christian hope ; such are its *objects*, and such the immutable basis on which it rests.

What then are its *effects?* for hope is no dormant principle ; in the spiritual as well as moral world its operation is energetic and unceasing. It is the grand spring of vigour and alacrity. What but the hope of conquest and renown nerves the arm of the warrior? What but the expectation of enjoyment and repose after the fatigues of the day, supports the laborer amidst his incessant toil? Incited by this flattering principle, the adventurous merchant quits his native clime, and tempts the dangers of a faithless element. Unwearied in his pursuit, he contentedly pants beneath the fervors of a tropical sun, and braves the rigors of the tempestuous north. His object is affluence ; but how often does his hope deceive him ! how often does his eventful voyage terminate in the bitterness of disappointment ! Even if his end be attained, how unsatisfactory and how fleeting his envied possession ! Yet still he persists. And shall Christian hope —a hope conversant with objects infinitely more important in their nature, and, which adds inexpressibly to their value, objects eternal and unchanging—be esteemed a speculative or inefficient principle? The promises of the gospel were intended to awaken men to spiritual life and activity. A mere belief of the existence of Heaven and Hell, without any means of attaining the one or avoiding the other, would but have

chilled the affections of the heart, and have paralyzed every generous faculty into inaction. It is the property of despair to benumb the soul, while hope adds toit unwonted elasticity and ardor. As the weary traveller, lost at midnight in the pathless wild, and scarcely able to urge along his sullen step, if by chance he perceive at a distance the cheerful glimmering of a taper, redoubles his pace, and in the eagerness of hope, forgets for a moment the fatigues and anxieties of the way,—so the Christian, exploring his path to the heavenly Canaan through this vale of tears, is oftentimes incited by the brightness of the distant prospect to new exertions in his course, and learns, from the consideration of his most triumphant privileges, to adopt in his practice the exhortation of Saint Paul, "Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, *forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*"

The Apostle, in writing to the Gentiles, often illustrates the practical effects of Christian faith and hope by allusions to the well-known Grecian games. He describes, for instance, the candidates in the Isthmian foot-race, as practising rigid temperance and self-denial, and submitting to the most painful restraints, in order to prepare themselves for the important contest. Their highest ambition was excited; all their renown acquired in former victories, and which was usually considerable, and dearer to them than life itself, was now at stake. This last contest was to decide their lot, and they were to return home covered with glory, or overwhelmed with reproaches, the most despised or the most illustrious of men. Having once become candidates for the prize, there remained no alternative between the extremes of honor and contempt. To elevate their minds to the utmost ardor of artificial excitement, the most studied efforts of friends and countrymen were incessantly employed. The song of the poet and the eulogy of the historian continually

sounded in their ears. No stimulant of virtue to arouse the torpid energies of the fallen mind was omitted.—Pride, envy, patriotism, natural affection, and the approbation of their gods, all conspired to raise them to the highest pitch of phrensied expectation. Thus preternaturally excited, they approached the eventful scene. If new incentives were wanting, they were now abundantly supplied. The presence of their kings and heroes, of their poets and philosophers, the alternately breathless silence and rapturous shouts of myriads of their expecting countrymen, the applauses of their friends, and the taunts of their enemies, the remembrance of former victories, the dread of future disgrace; above all, the honorary chaplet that waited the victorious brow, conferring a glory superior in their eyes to the diadem of princes,—all concurred to infuse the proudest hopes, the most ardent desires, into their undaunted souls. The race once begun, every nerve and ligament is strained to obtain the long-hoped-for prize. One object only fills the panting bosom.—Every consequence is risked. If victory be gained, they value not life itself for its attainment. Thus winged by expectation, and treading as it were on air, they urge with incredible celerity their breathless course, their hopes and fears rapidly increasing as they approach the goal, till at length a few moments put an end to their toil, and crown the victor with the hard-earned wreath. Alluding to this scene, a scene with which the Corinthians were perfectly conversant, the Apostle introduces an observation as striking and important as it is natural and unaffected: "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible;" evidently implying that the conduct of the Christian should correspond to the unequalled magnitude of his hopes, and the arduous nature of his contest. The antagonist of the Olympic wrestler was but a mortal like himself; but "WE wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities, and powers, and the

rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places." The spectators of *his* contest were frail and ignorant men, who proved by their ardor in such a worthless cause, how little they knew of the really dignified ends for which mankind was created; but the contest of the Christian is beheld and approved by kindred spirits upon earth, by an innumerable company of saints and angels in heaven, and by the Eternal Judge himself, "who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Above all, *their* reward was but a perishable garland, which has long since mouldered away with the brow which it adorned; while the prize of *our* high vocation is "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." As therefore our hope is inexpressibly glorious, our spiritual exertions ought to be constant, energetic, and unreserved. The health and vigor of the soul are to the Christian, what the health and vigor of the body were to the Olympic champion. Let us then study to preserve them by mortifying our corrupt affections, and by a continual spirit of prayer and watchfulness, of dependence and humility.

Another effect ascribed by the apostle to Christian hope, is, that every person possessing it, "purifieth himself, even as God is pure." It is remarkable that this very property of purifying the heart is ascribed also to faith, which not only shows the intimate connexion between these two principles, but also effectually obviates any suspicion of their being hostile to good works.

The necessity of purification evidently implies, that by nature we are polluted with sin; a doctrine indeed so luminously displayed in scripture, that it is difficult to conceive how it should ever have been denied.—But in what manner, it may be asked, does hope purify the soul? What connexion can it have with sanctification? The answer is easy. In the first

place, it is evidently *congruous* that he who expects such high and heavenly blessings should be qualified by holiness for the enjoyment of them. And as it is congruous, it is also *necessary;* for though our only title to heaven is the infinite mercy of Christ applied to us by faith, yet our qualification for it is holiness of heart, and, by consequence, of life, "without which no man shall see the Lord." A hope which looks forward to a scene where worldliness has never intruded, where sensual gratifications are unknown, where avarice and pride, voluptuousness and evil passion—in a word, where every thing sinful and contaminating is forever excluded—must of necessity be accompanied with some degree of mental purification. The only limit affixed by the apostle is, "even as God is pure;" and although this expression corresponds, it must be lamented, rather to the Christian's habitual desire than to his actual attainment, yet it shows at least the radical excellency of that principle from which so glorious a desire can spring.

Among the effects of hope, it is scarcely necessary to observe that joy is especially included, since this is confessedly its most natural and evident result. Saint Paul speaks of "rejoicing in hope," as not less a duty than being "patient in tribulation," and "instant in prayer." A man who really expects that "all things will work together for his good," cannot but be happy. Though involved in an arduous conflict, he knows that through the "Captain of his salvation," the victory is secure. He therefore rejoices in hope now, and shall rejoice in eternal fruition hereafter.

A valuable property of Christian hope is, that at the worst of seasons, it preserves us from defection. It is "the anchor of the soul," which being "cast within the veil," renders our feeble bark steady and secure amidst the storms of a tempestuous world. Hence the apostle says, "we are saved," that is, preserved, "by hope." The firm belief and pleasurable anticipation of future

glories are more than a counterbalance for every present danger, persecution, or disappointment. The apostle was an illustrious example of his position, that we are preserved by hope. "In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren, in weariness, in painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, *besides* those things which were without, the care of all the churches;" what, but the full assurance of hope of the eternal glory that should follow, could have preserved his unwearied constancy? But incited by this unconquerable principle, he cheerfully submitted to all that malice or misconception could inflict. Plunged continually in an overwhelming sea of troubles and persecutions, the buoyancy of hope instantly elevated him to the surface, and enabled him calmly to overlook the surrounding storm. We have no instance upon record of his ever being once betrayed into impatience, despondency, or irritation. His exertions were grounded upon principle, and were therefore permanent and uniform. In patience he possessed his soul. His success among the heathen may in a great measure be imputed, under God, to two Christian graces, for which he was remarkably conspicuous,—the "meekness of wisdom," and the "patience of hope;" both, however, under the benign influence of that "love unfeigned" which pervaded his whole soul, and added an engaging sweetness to all his labors. That faith in the gospel, and a fully assured hope of its inestimable blessings, should inflame his zeal and diligence in preaching it to others, was no uncommon result; but that a zeal so ardent, a diligence so unconquerable, should have been uniformly guided by the "meekness of wisdom," was a circumstance of

rare occurrence. In persons of ordinary character it is not unusual to perceive an eager and laudable zeal for the eternal welfare of their fellow-creatures, combined, however, with but little of that meek discretion which in a world of sin and prejudice is required to give due effect to the most praise-worthy exertions; and with still less, perhaps, of that "patience of hope," which is necessary to support the pious philanthropist amidst the delays, misrepresentations, ingratitude, and disappointments, incident to so momentous an attempt. To be destitute of the "patience of hope" is however a serious defect in a religious character. Zeal without long-suffering and humility is of little value. When the Christian was commanded to let his "light shine before men," it was not meant that he should resemble a meteor, dazzling the world for a moment with an unmeaning glare, and then angrily sinking into darkness; but rather, that he should imitate the celestial luminary, which daily rises almost unheeded to perform his important task, and gradually waxes brighter and more fervent; and patiently and steadily diffusing blessings around him both on the evil and the good, without being at all influenced by the applauses or the censures of this lower world.

If then Christian hope be so exalted an attainment, it becomes a question of great practical importance, in what manner it may be acquired? It is not the sanguine, unauthorized expectation of a presumptuous fancy, but the deliberate dictate of a mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit to discover the true evidences of Christian piety, and taught by the same Spirit to decide humbly, but correctly, upon its own state. To cherish hope without previous self-examination, is not less a mark of folly than of presumption. Before therefore we profess to obtain "a good hope through grace," it is necessary that we should institute an impartial inquiry into our real state. Have we, for instance, sincerely repented of sin, feeling, as our Church

expresses it, "the remembrance of it to be grievous, the burden of it to be intolerable?" Perceiving, at the same time, our utter inability to save ourselves by our own merits, have we humbly applied to our Creator for pardon, through the worthiness and obedience of his dearly beloved Son, the only Mediator between offended Deity and offending man? Has such a change taken place in our hearts, that sin, even in its more specious forms, has become hateful, and holiness and obedience to God our element and delight? Do we love and serve our Maker supremely and without reserve? Have we complied with the exhortation of the apostle, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds?" Has a sense of the value of the soul and the importance of eternity become predominant in our minds? Have we cheerfully submitted to the mode of salvation revealed in scripture, as conscious sinners, feeling our guilt and inability, and in humble penitence trusting to the merits of the Redeemer alone for acceptance with God? Is our faith evidenced by good works? by the implantation of Christian graces and virtues in the soul, and the hourly exhibition of their benign influence in our lives and conduct? Do we know the value, and practise the duty, of prayer and divine communion? Do we cultivate and rejoice in all "the means of grace," which were expressly intended to keep alive in us "the *hope* of glory?" Do we earnestly pray that God would "search and try us," and enable us faithfully to ascertain our true character? In a word, have we "presented ourselves, our souls and bodies, a living sacrifice unto God, which is our *reasonable* service;" resolving "to live no longer unto ourselves, but unto Him who bought us with the price of his own most precious blood?"

In estimating the propriety of our hopes, we should never cease to remember, that no hope is well founded which is not accompanied by faith and love. Trust

in the promises of God, through Christ, is the ground of Christian hope; charity is its never-failing effect. The soul beholding by the eye of faith the glories of futurity, and already enjoying them by lively anticipation, cannot but melt into ardent love to their beneficent Dispenser. A consequent desire to behold him as he is, to enjoy his eternal smile, and to utter before him the delightful homage of gratitude and adoration, becomes a predominant feeling of the bosom. Since, however, the infinite Source of benevolence and loveliness is invisible to mortal eyes, and needs not mortal assistance, the enraptured soul can only vent its fervent desires and heavenly affections, by transferring to his visible image upon earth those labors of love, those ardors of charity, which are but faint and feeble imitations of the Creator's unspeakable love and beneficence towards us. But faint and feeble as they are, he graciously accepts them; "Forasmuch as ye did it to the least of these little ones, ye did it unto me."

Thus are the three Christian graces connected by an indissoluble bond. Faith is the parent of hope, and hope is the companion of charity. Faith shall soon be lost in sight, and hope in enjoyment; but charity shall still survive, the same in kind, though much higher in degree, with that which even now inspires the heaven-born soul. The two former were intended only for a state of probation; the latter is essential and eternal, being the bond which joins the Creator to his creatures, and by which his creatures, in proportion as they resemble him, will be mutually united to each other. The Christian's love to God, which is now so cold and imperfect, shall then be exalted to transports inconceivable. When faith and hope are superseded, this immortal principle of love will be continually receiving new accessions of fervor by the unclouded presence and nearer approach of its long-expected object. If then we would ascertain the nature of our faith and hope, let us especially examine

whether they be accompanied by divine love; a love tending primarily and supremely to God, and displayed by a constant disposition to benefit the bodies and souls of our fellow-creatures. "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and good conscience, and faith unfeigned." "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

It not unfrequently occurs, that sincere Christians, who, upon careful self-examination, accompanied with earnest prayer, appear to have good reason to believe themselves possessors of true religion, are still far from experiencing that full assurance of hope which is always a desirable attainment. The fault being however in ourselves, and not in our Heavenly Parent, who never withholds the comforts of religion, except where he perceives that we are not yet made sufficiently meet to receive them, it may not be useless to suggest a few practical hints for obtaining the desired blessing.

Meditate frequently upon God; not so much, however, in his abstracted perfections, as in his covenantal relations to us in the economy of human redemption. A mere belief in a Being omnipotent and everlasting, self-derived and unapproachable, infinitely holy and inflexibly just, is by no means necessarily productive of the full assurance of hope. Learn rather to view him as a reconciled Father, an almighty Guardian, a divine Comforter, a patient and unerring Guide. Contemplate his benignity, his compassion, his long-suffering. Repose in him as an unchanging friend, aspire after him as your "exceeding great reward." Behold his immutable veracity, his supreme power, and his unbounded wisdom, not as mere abstract properties of the Divinity, but as harmonizing with that goodness and mercy which prompted him to redeem a wicked and ungrateful world. Reflect with holy fervor upon his love, as displayed in the person of his Son, the all-powerful Mediator and Advocate between God and man; and upon his promises of pardon and blessing

to the returning penitent, through faith in the beneficent Redeemer. Study to be more humble, more vigilant, and more submissive to his will. Quench not his Holy Spirit by worldliness or unbelief. Watch over those evil tempers and unhallowed propensities which too often intercept the light of his divine countenance.—Learn from your past experience of his mercy a lesson of implicit confidence. Especially neglect not that important means of obtaining the full assurance of hope —fervent and continual prayer. Hope, like faith, is the gift of God, and is bestowed freely on all who ask; Saint Paul therefore makes it the subject of one of his most animated intercessional benedictions. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." It cannot be doubted but that "the Author of every good and perfect gift" can produce within us the plerophory of hope in such a manner as to raise the mind above all doubt and perturbation. This appears to have been eminently the case of Saint Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." "The Spirit itself," the same apostle teaches, "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Prayer, therefore, for the influences of this Holy Spirit is an evident means of obtaining the comfort of hope. The very act of prayer, if it spring from the heart, evidences that we already possess some degree of hope in the willingness of God to listen to our petitions; and since habitual prayer familiarizes us to the contemplation of his gracious encouragements and promises, it tends to strengthen and confirm the hope from which it sprang. For hope is an increasing grace; like other habits it becomes stronger by practice, and it contains in itself the seeds of its future growth and perfection. Where

it exists but in the lowest degree, it causes love to its celestial objects; and love, by its habitual contemplation of God, daily beholding in him new grounds of trust and confidence, gives birth, in return, to more exalted hopes. Thus do understanding, faith, hope, and charity, mutually act and re-act, augmenting and augmented by their reciprocal influence, till they all arrive at that maturity which constitutes the Christian's highest attainment in this present world.

It is delightful to behold the advanced spiritual traveller, after the fatigues of his toilsome day, arriving in the evening of life within sight of his eternal home. Elevated, like Moses, upon the heights of Pisgah, far above the busy crowd with whom he has so long associated, he is enabled from the serene eminence on which he stands to behold at once the country he has left, and that to which he is hastening. He looks back upon his chequered path, surprised that obstacles which now appear so trifling, compared with the importance of the objects in view, should so long have retarded his progress. The interposing mountains which once he thought impassable, have now lost their asperities, and appear but as airy clouds in the distant horizon. With sorrow he retraces his frequent deviations from the direct path in search of giddy phantoms, which oftentimes, after all his efforts, eluded his pursuit, or if obtained, proved but an encumbrance to him in his arduous pilgrimage. Animated by the beauty of the country which lies before him, and which is separated from him only by the dark river of death that rolls along its sullen wave to the ocean of eternity, he looks back with regret and wonder upon that infatuation which so often induced him to prefer the trifles of the scene through which he was journeying, to the celestial glories of yon blissful shore. "Forgetting therefore these things which are behind," he "reaches forth to those which are before." His hopes are in heaven. He adopts the language of the

Psalmist, "What wait I for?"—For worldly honors? They cannot fill the unbounded grasp of an immortal soul. For pleasures? They are unsatisfactory and fleeting. Thousands of dying voluptuaries have confessed their inability to produce happiness, and have bitterly lamented their own folly in pursuing them.—For riches? They are valuable only as applied to the responsible ends for which they were bestowed, but by no means tend to make a death-bed easy, or eternity more welcome. "What then wait I for? Surely my hope is in thee, O Lord." I wait not for any thing mutable or terrestrial. Wealth, and honors, and long life, will not satiate my desires. God shall be my portion forever. I shall "be filled with all the fulness of God."

CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE.

Few errors are more common, or more injurious, than the idea that our Saviour came upon earth to soften down the requisitions of the divine law. We do not perhaps avow the sentiment in plain terms, but does not our general spirit too often prove it to be a latent article of our belief?

The most ostentatious formalist will not assert that he has *fully* performed that unlimited obedience which God required of Adam before the fall. He sees indeed that the thing is impossible. He even readily acknowledges some trifling imperfections, some casual inadvertencies, some slight mental aberrations. He will not exactly affirm that a wrong thought never once glanced through his mind—that a useless or improper word never once passed his lips—that a selfish, or thoughtless, or otherwise imperfect action never once marked his conduct. He dares not say, that from his very infancy he has loved the Lord his God with "*all* his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength," or that he has loved his neighbor exactly as himself. He trusts, however, that his heart is good, that he has no flagrant crime to answer for, and that his "sins, negligences, and ignorances," are all of so venial a kind as to be easily forgiven.

Without stopping to comment upon the various objectionable parts of this statement, especially the total ignorance which it implies of the nature and extent of the divine requisitions, were we to proceed to ask upon what he grounded his hopes of salvation, which, by his

own acknowledgment, could not be claimed upon the condition of unerring obedience, the answer would probably be, "God is merciful: he does not expect men to be angels: he made us, and will allow something for our natural infirmities."

Still, however, this answer, to say no worse, is vague and unsatisfactory. Reasoning upon the principles of natural religion, it may be fairly assumed, that if by being angels is meant being perfect in holiness and obedience, God *does* expect man to be as holy as an angel, for he originally made him such, and never superinduced any thing to render him otherwise. If by our fall we became incapable of perfect obedience, it is our crime and our misfortune, but by no means our excuse. God made us "very good," and capable of performing all that he required. Our sins and infirmities are entirely self-derived.

The question then still recurs, and must be answered some other way. Natural religion being foiled in its attempts, modernized Christianity enters, and thoughtlessly professes to solve the difficulty. "We live under a lenient dispensation. The obedience and death of Christ have great weight; so that if our conduct be upon the whole moral and sincere, all is well. A few thoughtless amusements, a few venial faults, a few giddy follies of youth, will never be regarded by our Creator as unpardonable crimes."

Now, is it not the obvious tendency of this language to prove that God is too merciful to be just, too attentive to his benevolence to spend a thought upon his veracity? Not being able or even willing to reach the standard of his law, we strive to lower his law to our imperfect practice. But upon what principle of religion, either natural or revealed, do we make the attempt? Admitting that God is originally entitled to universal obedience, whence do we infer that he has relinquished his claim? Surely not from natural reason, and much less from scripture; for though the

Redeemer died to procure pardon for our awful violation of obedience, when by repentance and faith we turn unto him whom we have forsaken, he did not render obedience less a duty. So far indeed from it, he defined its nature, and added new motives and encouragements to its performance. Obedience to God is the *original* law of our creation. It is an obligation eternal and immutable. The excellency of Christianity consists, not in superseding its necessity, but in making it an object of desire and delight, at the same time that it reveals pardon by the *vicarious obedience of Christ Jesus* to those who by the decision of natural religion must have been otherwise reduced to despair.

The idea therefore that we who live since the advent of the Messiah are placed under a more accommodating law—a law which is satisfied with a *partial* obedience—is evidently derogatory to the unchangeable perfections of our Creator. The peremptory requisitions of God's law are unaltered and unalterable, and so that it is not by pleading our own imperfect obedience, however sincere, but the full and perfect obedience of our Surety, that we can scripturally hope for the blessings of salvation. If a partial obedience had been sufficient, Christ died in vain.

Extremes frequently approach, and it is evidently so in the case before us. The anti-legalist, in his exclusive zeal for doctrines, asserts that Christ entirely abolished the moral law as a rule of conduct: while the nominal Christian persuades himself that he came to soften down its requisitions; that is, abolished it in part. The first, it must be confessed, substitutes the "law of love" in the place of the moral code; but the system of the latter is wholly incongruous and disjointed. If Christ has in any measure lowered the obedience that was naturally due to God, so that a person whose works are allowedly imperfect may be saved by them, because they equal the usual standard of professed Christians, to what degree of absurdity

may not the doctrine be carried? If a mere thoughtless, giddy worlding may expect salvation by this remedial law, because perhaps he has not been guilty of flagrant acts of turpitude, we could not reasonably exclude another who was but one shade worse; and thus we might proceed in the scale of moral depravity, till there was not an individual in existence to whom salvation was not justly due.

It is owing to the frequent, though perhaps almost unconscious encouragement of this serious error, that the great doctrine of the atonement is not more distinctly acknowledged and acted upon by the majority of professed Christians. They think they shall surely arrive at heaven because Christ, they imagine, has rendered the conditions of obtaining it perfectly easy; —so easy indeed, that a baptized person may indulge the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and yet be a Christian amidst all. Not considering the extent and immutability of the law, they perceive not the nature or value of the gospel. They cannot indeed, on account of their acknowledged imperfections, trust *entirely* to the inexorable "covenant of works" under which Adam was created; yet being unwilling to comply with the humbling "covenant of grace," which, while it promises *free* pardon upon our repentance and faith, makes a holy and obedient heart the indispensable criterion of our having been enabled to accept that covenant, they waver between the two, and endeavor to soften down the irreversible law of our creation by a few qualifying clauses wrested from the covenant of grace.

This conduct is, however, highly unchristian; for our Lord, so far from having come upon earth to render the divine law less strict, expressly pointed out its spiritual and universal nature, and applied it to the very "thoughts and intents of the heart." He did not emancipate us from our allegiance, though he proclaimed remission of sin and punishment to all who

lamenting that they had broken it, should, with earnest repentance and implicit faith in his mercy, return to the propitiated Sovereign from whom they had revolted. He reconciled us unto God; not that we might from henceforth live with impunity "Atheists in the world," seeking our own pleasure, and following our own devices; but that being adopted into his family, we might become spiritual and holy, and meet for the heavenly inheritance which he had provided for his returning child. He did not preach grace in order that sin might abound; but, on the contrary, attached the application of his grace inseparably and exclusively to such a renovation of heart as should make sin appear an object of abhorrence.

It is then obvious that the expectation of heaven, so usual even amongst those who never once seriously considered how it might be scripturally obtained, arises from ignorance of the natural and unalterable requisitions of the divine law. We trust to the uncovenanted mercies of God, because we are not sensible of what his justice demands. It cannot therefore be uninteresting to those who "call themselves Christians," seriously to inquire what is the real nature and extent of the obedience which we owe to our Creator.

In the first place, it should be *universal*, without partiality or reserve. David said, "I shall not be ashamed when I have respect to *all* God's commandments." It is not occasionally splendid acts, but uniformity of principle that God requires. To be free from the grosser violations of duty, whilst we willingly tolerate what we call trifling faults, is of no avail. As far as the habit of mind is concerned,—and it is this to which Omniscience chiefly looks,—the distinction between venial and mortal sin is unscriptural and delusive. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." Willingly to indulge any one evil habit, even supposing we were free from all others, would render us partakers of the guilt

of Saul, who slew the Amalekites, but spared Agag their king. *Every* thought must be brought into willing captivity. It is to little purpose that the judgment is convinced, if the will, the fancy, the affections, be disobedient. He who has an unalienable right to the whole, will not be satisfied with a part. Obedience that extends only to what is agreeable, and lasts only as long as it suits our convenience, is too partial and too transient to deserve the divine acceptance. If we love religion while she inspires our hopes, but part from her as soon as she thwarts our inclinations, our friendship is worthless and insincere. While we pray that "we may obtain that which God doth promise," we must also "love that which he doth command."

Our obedience also must correspond to our knowledge of the Creator's will. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." There are many things which though tolerated and even applauded in general society, including, perhaps, most of the worldly amusements of the present age, are yet inconsistent with the self-denying and heavenly spirit of a professed inhabitant of a better country, who is only passing through the present world as a state of probation and moral restraint. Of these, Christian obedience demands an impartial and cheerful surrender. It forbids compromise or reserve. It is a stranger to that worldly policy, which sometimes affecting the name of Christian prudence, consents to commit a questionable evil in order to produce an unquestionable good. Saul, perhaps, imagined that reserving a part of the spoil of the Amalekites, though God had commanded the whole to be destroyed, would be more than atoned for by so great an act of piety as the offering a magnificent sacrifice to Jehovah. It is thus that we often yield something to the world, in hopes that the world in return will be induced to yield something to religion. We follow an acquaintance to a doubtful amusement, with a view of afterwards alluring

him to an instructive sermon. We read his bad book, in hopes that he will read our good one. We propose what we believe to be wrong, to prevent, as we profess, what we know to be worse; thus making, as it were, a tacit calculation of how much sin we may commit in order to produce a certain quantity of holiness.

This, however, is not acting up to the light of Christianity, which teaches us never to violate one command of God under pretext of doing something more to his honor. The Supreme Disposer of Events may indeed elicit good from evil; but he never approves the sinner even when he overrules the crime. Nothing therefore is more inconsistent with true obedience than "doing evil that good may come," or trusting that the end will sanctify the means. "Simplicity and godly sincerity" are essential qualities of Christian obedience. It should be our chief effort to learn what is our duty, and to persist in it without fear of dangerous consequences, which he who overrules all hearts will either never permit to happen, or, if they happen, will never impute to our account.

Again, true obedience must be the obedience *of faith*. Even under the Jewish economy this heavenly grace was indispensable; and although it could not then be extended to many particulars which since the coming of the Messiah are revealed, yet it was to be perfect in its kind. It embraced those promises which were to be fulfilled when Shiloh should come, and relied upon the veracity of God for their accomplishment. It was faith that made the ceremonial observances acts of genuine obedience. When Saint Paul, rapt in divine meditation, beheld the glorious "cloud of witnesses," and sketched with the glowing colours of a seraph their immortal deeds, he ascribed them all to this exalted principle. Their obedience was the obedience of faith. The same acts performed without the same motives would have been worthless and unaccepted.

Select any one example from the glorious catalogue, and try it by this test. When Abraham, for instance, was commanded to offer up his son, he had to contend not only with his paternal affection, which must have been doubly harrowed up by the affecting minuteness of the command, "thy son—thine only son—Isaac —whom thou lovest;" but with that distrust of the divine goodness, and veracity, and power, which naturally represented the mandate as wholly subversive of a former promise, "in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Yet knowing that the word of Jehovah was inviolably firm, he feared not the result. At the awful moment when every hope was about to be extinguished,—his son bound upon the altar,—the parent's hand extended to inflict the mortal stroke, faith rose triumphant in his bosom, and "accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead." His trust in God was unconquerable by human reason or human foresight. Having once ascertained the divine will, he implicitly and even cheerfully obeyed.

Let us now imagine the same action performed from a different motive. Suppose, for example, he had complied, viewing his Creator as an unreasonable tyrant, who was able to punish him still more severely in case of disobedience. "Resistance," he might have argued, "is in vain. If I fail to comply, my son will still be taken, and perhaps by more severe and lasting torments. My whole household also may share his misfortune, and my grey hairs at length, stained and dishonored, be brought with sorrow to the grave. Cruel, therefore, as is the command, I will, I must, comply."

Now is it not evident that compliance from such a motive would have been wholly unacceptable to God? Our Maker looks for trust and dependence. A good action performed, or a bad one avoided, merely from a principle of slavish dread, would neither merit nor

receive his approbation. In addition therefore to faith, *love* is an essential quality in Christian obedience; for "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love." No act, therefore, whether ceremonial or moral, ("circumcision or uncircumcision,") is truly acceptable, unless it spring from "love to God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." The divine command is, "My son, give me thy *heart;*" but the religion of more than half the world is an attempt at commutation. The voluptuary stipulates, that if he may be allowed quietly to resign his heart to the vanities and pleasures of the world, as long as he retains his vigor and his youth, he will give in exchange a few ardent prayers upon a death-bed, a few unavailing tears, a few sighs of deep-felt contrition, a few closing moments of devotion to God, out of a whole life, due to his honor and his service. The covetous man yields his heart to his gold, but trusts that Heaven will accept the posthumous equivalent of a charitable bequest. The nominal Christian is content to yield an hour's external homage on the Sabbath, on the condition that the world shall enjoy the undisputed possession of his affections during the week; or should conscience sometimes begin to reproach him, he throws into the scale a fast or a festival, and doubts not but this will effectually turn it in his favor. The inconsistent devotee, whose heart is usurped by the avaricious and malignant spirit of gaming, is determined that the commutation shall be perfectly liberal, and therefore, perhaps daily, frequents the service of the church, and endeavors, during its continuance, to spend as few thoughts as possible upon the interesting engagement that is so soon to succeed. This restraint, however, being very irksome, is looked upon as purchasing a more than usual indulgence for a worldly spirit; and should even a little pride, or discontent, or anger, or covetousness, or envy, or censoriousness, shortly after find admis-

sion, it will be easily excused at the tribunal of conscience, on account of the precious stock of merit acquired by so good an act.

Penances, and pilgrimages, and masses, and lazarettos, and college endowments, and churches or chapels "adorned and beautified," are but a few of the ostentatious equivalents which have been offered to our Creator for the revolted affections of the heart; but He who "giveth not his honor to another" spurns at the degrading compromise, and accepts of no gift that does not spontaneously flow from the cordial obedience of faith and love. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Not indeed that external observances are to be neglected; not that prayers, and fasting, and almsdeeds are to be discountenanced: they are undoubtedly all excellent and indispensable, and the only danger is when they are intended as substitutes for something higher. The "form of godliness" is necessary, but cannot atone for the absence of the "power."—Where the heart and affections are devoted to God, these things will not, cannot, be left undone; but the converse is by no means true, that wherever these things are performed, the heart is necessarily devoted to God. The act which men applaud for its piety, is oftentimes but a sacrifice to decency or custom, if not to ostentation and the love of praise.

It is to the *motive* that we must chiefly look for the immense difference between the moralist and the Christian, the Pharisee and the genuine disciple. The good works of the one spring from a principle of gratitude and affection; those of the other from habit, or expediency, or fear, or at best from an arrogant expectation of purchasing heaven by the performance.—The one is an obedient child, the other an unwilling slave.

If, however, an earthly parent would not be satisfied with an obedience wholly unprompted by affection, why should we offer the same insult to our Father which is in heaven? No person who loves any object better than his Creator can be said to be truly obedient. God requires our supreme and unrivalled affections; which being once engaged, our conduct will necessarily become holy and acceptable in his eyes.

To render obedience complete, it must be constant and unremitted. There are no excepted moments in which a rival is allowed. Amidst the fatigues and the anxieties of life, our spirit must be uniformly Christian. Religion, though not always in our thoughts, must be so interwoven with the first springs of action, as to be always conspicuous in our conduct. Surrounded with the worshippers of the world, we must never bow our knee to their enchanting idol. The apostle exhorts us in the very same verse both to be diligent in business, and "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;" so that the importance of our callings in life is by no means an excuse for our neglect of eternal concerns. God is far from accepting that aguish piety which works itself up into a warm fit of devotion every seventh day, and then contentedly shivers and freezes the other six. Our devotion should be the regular glow of a soul in spiritual health, and not the alternate frost and fever of mere sentimental Christianity. A few tears shed in passion-week will not evince our love for the Redeemer, if we are deliberately "crucifying him afresh, and putting him to an open shame" during the remainder of the year. Unusually solemn occasions, it is true, call for unusually solemn acts; but the general impression should remain long after the individual act has ceased. The gospel being intended for all ages, and climates, and conditions in life, was made of such a nature that its energy might be unintermitted in every possible variety of circumstance. Had it simply consisted of a stated

routine of ceremonies, its operation must frequently have been suspended, or even rendered wholly impracticable; but what season or circumstance is there which can prevent the obedience of *the heart?* In business and at leisure, at home and abroad, in prosperity and adversity, in sickness and in health, the habitual desire to obey God will find means to operate in acts appropriate to the occasion. There is no moment in which there is not some temptation to be avoided, none in which there is not some duty to be performed.

In reply to these remarks, it may be said, that if our Creator requires an obedience such as has been described,—an obedience universal and impartial, fully commensurate with our knowledge of his will, uniformly grounded on faith and love, and exerted during the whole of our lives without intermission or reserve,—who can possibly be saved? for where is the favored mortal who in this world of imperfection can boast of such an obedience?

These questions conduct us at once to the whole scheme of Christianity. It is evident that upon the condition of perfect obedience our case is hopeless; and it is equally evident that imperfect obedience, however sincere, will not satisfy the divine law, which has a right to demand all that God originally created man able to perform. But infinite wisdom, combining with infinite goodness, devised a plan by which every difficulty is removed. How completely therefore do the doctrines of the gospel meet our case! Man, on account of his disobedience, finds himself obnoxious to the divine wrath, and therefore needs an atonement. An atonement is provided. "He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might be the righteousness of God in him." The Messiah was constituted the "Mediator of a better covenant." It harmonized with the attributes of Deity to accept his vicarious obedience as the means of our pardon and justification. This is

the ineffable mystery which human reason could never have discovered, but which is unequivocally revealed in a volume that possesses indubitable marks, both internal and external, of the divinity of its origin. We are required to believe this obedience to be perfect and all-sufficient to the exclusion of every thing else as the procuring cause of our redemption. This, however, is no easy task. We are unwilling to allow that Jesus Christ discharged the *whole* debt, and are ever attributing some degree of merit to our own performances; forgetting that the coin which we naturally offer in part of payment is defective in quality as well as quantity—that it is false as well as inadequate—that for want of Christian motives it is a mere counterfeit obedience, worthless in the sight of God, and unable to purchase the rewards of heaven.

The expressions in our thirteenth Article are so exceedingly strong upon this subject, that were they not evidently founded upon scripture, we might be inclined to question their truth. "Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not out of faith in Jesus Christ;"—"yea rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."

It appears therefore that a *renovation of heart* is necessary to render our best acts of obedience acceptable to God. The actions of a converted man assume a new character, being performed from new motives, and under the influence of the divine "inspiration." It is an elevating thought to believe our Creator ever present, assisting us by his Holy Spirit to perform such works as shall be acceptable in his sight, and silently guiding us in the delightful paths of Christian obedience. Those very acts which, though laudable in themselves, once "partook of the nature of sin," by reason of the sinfulness of their agent, now become

acts of holiness, and are grateful to our Heavenly Parent on account of the renovated principles from which they spring.

The Church of England, in the Article preceding that which has been just quoted, renders this subject exceedingly plain. "Albeit that good works, which are the *fruits* of faith, and follow *after* justification, cannot put away our sins or endure the severity of God's judgments, yet they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit."

From this Article we may evidently infer several important facts.

1. That our good works cannot, in the opinion of the Church, "put away our sins, or endure the severity of God's judgments;" or, what is nearly the same thing, that they have no power to *justify* us, since they cannot even exist till *after* justification, being the *fruits* of faith, and not its precursors. We are thus necessarily led to look to some other cause of justification; namely, the vicarious sufferings and obedience of Christ, which are gratuitously applied to all who with "hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God."

2. We learn that *after* justification, and as fruits of faith, the works of the Christian are highly pleasing to God. A cup of cold water given to a disciple, *in the name of a disciple*, will not lose its reward, while the most praiseworthy actions, if performed from simply natural motives, or intended to co-operate with the merits of the Redeemer in purchasing salvation, are too worldly and self-sufficient to be esteemed acts of genuine obedience.

3. We learn not to trust to a dead inefficient faith; since the exalted principle to which the office of justifying is ascribed, "*necessarily*" produces good works;

"insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by its fruits."

How explicitly, yet how temperately, are Christian doctrines stated, how equally are they balanced, and how wisely are they guarded from unchristian inferences, in the judicious formularies of our venerable Church!

To the true Christian who feels and laments the imperfection of his obedience, who knows the delight of unreserved compliance, but finds that perverseness and depravity still remain to pollute his motives and contaminate his actions, nothing can be more consoling than the consideration of the plenary atonement of Christ, and the influence of the Eternal Spirit. Well might our Church assert that justification "by faith only," is "a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort;"—a doctrine, be it remembered, which can never be abused except by wilful perversion; for both repentance is necessary as the preparative for true faith, and obedience is its necessary result. Repentance implies that sin has become hateful in its nature, as well as terrific in its consequences. It is therefore the supreme desire of every true penitent to live a life of obedience: he laments only that his efforts are not more undivided and effectual. He should however remember, for his comfort, that his sanctification, though slow, is constantly progressive. If he daily increase in discovering and lamenting his sinfulness, it is not because he is in reality become worse, but because his knowledge is growing more accurate and his conscience more susceptible. Let him therefore derive comfort from the promises of assistance and support which are treasured in the volume of life, and let him anticipate those realms of bliss where he shall perfectly obey his covenant Father without intermission or reserve.

THE FORM AND THE POWER OF RELIGION.

Saint Paul, in writing to Timothy, has pointedly foretold what classes of persons should exist in the latter days. He prophesied that "perilous times" should come, and the specific argument on which he grounded his assertion was, that men should be "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power."

Had the apostle been all his life conversant with the various classes of society in the present age and country, it would have been impossible for him to have sketched a more correct outline of modern character; but this will not excite wonder, if we reflect that "holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and were instructed to describe the evil beforehand, in order that we who are exposed to its contagion might be guarded against its influence.

Were we to select from the apostle's catalogue of vices those characteristics which more especially mark the present day, scarcely one particular in the enumeration could be omitted, and it should be remarked that these appalling features are not the mere indiscriminate traits of human character, but are eminently specific and appropriate. They point out the peculiar as well as the general faults of modern times, and could not have been foretold but by that omniscient Spirit who knew the end from the beginning.

But the most extraordinary feature in the whole portrait is,—not that men should be guilty of such vices, but that amidst them all they should still seriously "profess and call themselves Christians." When the apostle viewed with his holy and enlightened mind the real nature of the gospel, and felt, as he most deeply did, its sanctifying power in his own bosom, we might have thought he could scarcely have conceived it possible for men to profess the religion of Christ, while they revelled in all that was sinful and unchristian. But the guidance of immediate inspiration supplied what in those purer times of the church experience had scarcely began to suggest; and hence the apostle was enabled to foresee the inconsistencies which should shortly arise among professed Christians, and a knowledge of which may in the present age be, alas! too easily acquired without the aid of any new communication from above.

The possibility then, of having the form of godliness while the power is denied, cannot be a subject of doubt: in the present remarks, therefore, it will be simply attempted, for the sake of practical instruction, to point out a few characteristic features, by which the power may be distinguished from the form, and to make such other general observations as incidentally arise from the subject under consideration.

In the present age and country, a great majority of persons seriously profess themselves to be Christians; but amongst the individuals comprised under this common denomination, there are found some of almost every shade of sentiment and character. There is, however, one large class which may be passed by without controversy, namely, persons of openly immoral and vicious habits, and who indicate by overt signs that Christianity is with them avowedly but a name. Of men of this description, charity itself can have no hesitation in affirming that as yet they have "no part nor lot" in the blessings of the gospel. Their case is as

decisive as it is awful. A man, for instance, who never frequents divine worship, but revels in open iniquity, is a broadly-marked character, and carries conviction both to himself and others, that whoever may be right he is certainly wrong. He publicly neglects God upon earth, and cannot therefore have so much as a rational pretence for imagining himself an heir of that celestial kingdom of which the presence of the Creator constitutes the very bliss and perfection.

But the majority of professed Christians consists of persons of a somewhat more decent, but, perhaps, often equally delusive, character. They have not abandoned the profession of the gospel, nor forgotten the propriety and duty of attending public worship; they entertain a kind of vague dependence upon the death and sufferings of the Redeemer, and hope for pardon through his merits, in conjunction with their own works, which, judging by a very false and inadequate standard, they venture to denominate *good*. If seriously questioned as to their hopes of a future world, they usually reply in such a way as to show that amidst all their exterior decencies they have no true and penitent sense of their transgressions, nor of that change of heart and character without which no man can see the kingdom of God. Yet relying on an educational profession of Christianity, they imagine themselves secure, and, in many cases, not all the solemnities of a death-bed can open their eyes to the delusion.

Genuine religion is, however, something transcendently above this easy form and profession. It is of no spiritual utility to "name the name of Christ," unless also we "depart from iniquity:" it is of no avail to avow a belief in revelation, unless our hearts be really moulded according to its precepts. To profess religion from mere custom, without being really taught by the Spirit of God, is but to trust to an outward form, which simply and in itself is of no efficacy whatever towards human salvation.

The power of religion differs, in the first place, from the form, in springing from the heart, and being grounded on a deep conviction of our sinfulness, and the necessity of the redemption which is offered in the gospel. It is nothing superficial, or evanescent, or insincere. The partaker of it must have felt in his soul what he professes with his lips, that "he is tied and bound with the chain of his sin;" he must have perceived his guilt before God, and must have been "weary and heavy laden" with the consciousness of his infirmities; he must have mourned over his evil nature, and must have acknowledged his inability to merit heaven by his best observances: in a word, he must have experimentally learned some, at least, of the primary and fundamental truths of the gospel, before he can be truly said to have risen one single step above the mere formalities of religion.

A profession of piety which has not thus involved in its very elements a penitent consciousness of sin, will necessarily forsake us when we most need support, especially on a death-bed and at the last day. But the joy that succeeds a really "godly sorrow" will be lasting and substantial; for when in moments of danger the voice of conscience shall recall our sins to remembrance, the scene, though awful, will not be new; we shall come prepared to acknowledge the worst, yet by the mercy of God to hope the best; our character will have been ascertained long before, and having learned that "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin," we shall be enabled through him to cherish a humble expectation that our transgressions are forgiven and have lost their condemning power. We shall, indeed, feel them to be hateful, and doubly so on account of the pure and holy nature implanted in our hearts; but having long repented of them, having earnestly prayed and exerted ourselves against them, having desired, by the grace of God, never more to commit them, and, above all, having been enabled by

faith to view them as expiated by the sacrifice and merits of Him who alone *can* expiate sin, we shall learn to look up with holy confidence, that at the last day they shall not be permitted to appear in judgment against us, but shall be blotted out by the blood of the atonement. We shall not extenuate their malignity, we shall not place our supposedly good works in the opposite scale as a counterpoise to them, but fully knowing and confessing them in all their aggravations, we shall yet cherish "a good hope through grace," that they are atoned for by the sufferings and death of our ever blessed Redeemer.

But who shall describe the terrors of that man who having had throughout life "a form to live while he was dead," and who never having once really felt the guilt and misery which he so often professed with his lips, begins, for the first time, on a bed of sickness and in the prospect of death, to think seriously of his spiritual concerns and his eternal destination? Every past scene will then recur to his mind; his sins and vanities will now flit before his eyes as ghastly phantoms; and a consciousness of guilt will flash on his soul with painful and irresistible conviction. He will resemble a man, who having long neglected to settle his temporal affairs, when he at length begins to examine them, finds himself utterly ruined and insolvent. Scenes which he once thought merely idle, he will now feel to have been positively vicious; and what, as a rational being, he could not but despise, even while he professed to enjoy, he will now, with his newly-enlightened mind, perceive to have been as sinful as is was puerile, as fatal to his soul as it was unbecoming the dignity of his nature. At such a moment the mere form of religion will be useless, the power only can sustain the dying penitent, and enable him to triumph over sin and death, in the cheering prospect of those celestial regions where sin and death shall exist no more.

The power again differs from the form, by being

exclusively the work of the Spirit of God; whereas the latter is oftentimes nothing more than the offspring of custom, or education, or a sense of moral decency and political decorum. It is not difficult to continue during our whole lives regular attendants upon the exteriors of divine worship, by the mere force of good education and example; but this is a feeling very different from that influence of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, which alone can dispose us to "do unto God true and laudable service," impressing us with a deep and permanent sense of the value of our souls, and the importance of eternity, renewing our earthly affections, inclining us to God, and making us children of our Heavenly Father and heirs of his everlasting kingdom.

One of the greatest defects in the religious views of persons in general is, that they do not thus sufficiently recognize the Holy Spirit's influence, at least as a practical and personal concern. Hence they look upon the conversion of heart, of which the scriptures so often speak, as a slight, and, perhaps, an unimportant change of character; but were they duly to consider the power and majesty of the Agent, they would learn to infer the greatness of the operation, and would see that it is to little purpose to profess religion outwardly, unless the Spirit of God has really enlightened and converted the heart.

The power also differs essentially from the form, in being of a purifying nature. It makes the Christian desire to be perfect, even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect; for though he feels that sin may and must remain in him as long as he continues in the present world, yet the aspiration of his mind is towards the ineffable beauty of holiness, and the beatitude of a sinless state. We have certainly no scriptural reason to imagine our religion genuine, unless we are thus partakers of a new nature, inclining us to all that is holy, and rendering us averse from all that is sinful,

however much it might have been once naturally loved and admired, and however consistent it may still remain with the customs and the maxims of the world.

To evidence satisfactorily that our religion is more than form, we must be daily seeking after new attainments; forgetting those things which are behind, we must, like the apostle, press forward to those which are before. Where the power really exists, there will be a "growth in grace;" an increasing knowledge of the doctrines of the cross of Christ, and a corresponding love for its precepts; a growing devotedness to God, and deadness to the world; a progress in every thing spiritual and holy, and a retrocession from all that is earthly and impure. There will be daily contests with "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit and faith in the Redeemer, daily victories over them. There will be an increasing dread of sin in all its forms; so that a thousand things which once appeared innocent or laudable, will now be decidedly shunned as incompatible with an entire and unreserved devotedness to our Creator. We shall learn to feel more and more the proneness of our nature to temptation, and more and more the power of divine grace to overcome its allurements. The tenderness of our conscience will increase, and the fear of grieving the Spirit of God, and of wounding our own souls will become more deeply rooted and confirmed. There will be a susceptibility of religious feeling of which we had before no conception. Not only open sins, but the very glancing of a wrong thought through the mind will cause a holy sensation of pain and uneasiness, and will be followed, when we are in a right frame of soul, by a renewed prayer for pardon and reconciliation. The desire to increase in all Christian graces, and to be assimilated more and more to the image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, will become a permanent wish of the heart.

To the attainment of this end, among many other means, self-examination will be constantly practised; a duty which cannot possibly be omitted where the power of religion really exists. There will be an abiding wish to know our real state and character; we shall not shrink from the light, but, on the contrary, shall dread nothing so much as false security and self-deception. Every wish and feeling of the soul, every word which proceeds from the lip, every action of the life, will furnish a person thus rightly disposed with abundant matter for self-examination. Even when we are least conscious of it, we shall find, upon reflection, that if our hearts are really in a right state, we habitually and almost insensibly refer our thoughts, and words, and actions, to the standard of truth, and that we learn to view every thing immediately in its connexion with God and with eternity. It is not in our more sober moments only that we shall practise these duties; for we shall acquire a habit of constantly, and as it were naturally, investigating the nature of our conduct, and ascertaining what conclusion it suggests respecting our religious state. When sin presents itself before us, we shall feel a struggle to overcome its fascinations; and the heart will be elevated towards the throne of grace, for power to effect that holy purpose. The conquest, thus divinely bestowed, will be followed by a peaceful satisfaction; or, if we fall in the contest, there will ensue a salutary remorse, a godly contrition, very far above the merely natural remonstrances of conscience, teaching us that we have acted unwisely and ungratefully; that we have crucified our Redeemer afresh, and brought darkness, if not despair, into our own minds.

This uneasiness under conscious guilt will not abate till we are again enabled with true contrition to repent, to pray, to plead the merits of our Redeemer, and to obtain strength from above against the recurrence of temptation. Yet still there will remain a wound: the

remembrance of the past will be grievous; and though the peaceful consciousness of a latent hope in God's mercy will distinguish this genuine penitence from that "sorrow of the world" which worketh death, yet abundant cause will be left for renewed humility and watchfulness. Indeed, without these, the power of religion cannot survive; for when we are unguarded in our religious frame, we are inevitably exposed to the attacks of our spiritual enemies. The man who enjoys any thing of the power of his holy profession will aspire after a more humble and dependent frame of mind: he will long to be "clothed with humility," knowing from experience that pride, especially spiritual pride, is not only hostile to the whole tenor of the gospel which he professes, but invariably lays a snare before him, and causes him to fall. So far, therefore, from his superior privileges rendering him proud, they will serve to promote humility, by reminding him every moment of that free and unmerited grace which alone made him to differ from the mere formalist and Pharisee. Thus his very graces and conquests over sin increase his circumspection, and self-abasement, and prayer. The less power the world has over him, the more he is afraid of its allurements: the less susceptible he is of temptation, the more he avoids its influence; for it is not a mark of strong faith, but of very weak faith, or rather of none whatever, to sport on the brink of temptation, and to dally with those spiritual enemies whom we are commanded most anxiously to avoid.

The power of true religion is further and most importantly evidenced, by an habitual communion and intercourse with God in prayer. There will be a holy enjoyment, a sacred complacency, in this delightful ordinance, which never attends the mere form, where the essence is unknown. Prayer will become—what of course it ought to be—the constant disclosure of our wants, with a well-grounded consciousness that

our Heavenly Father is able and willing, out of the fulness treasured up in Christ Jesus, to supply them all. Not only will it be a tribute of love and gratitude, and an earnest desire after pardon and acceptance, but it will incidentally produce an important effect in meliorating the heart, and producing those very dispositions and graces which we implore. If prayer has not been really found to operate in this manner upon the heart of the worshipper, it must have been hitherto a form without power; for where the power exists the soul will necessarily partake, in some measure, of those affections which the lips express; the act of confession will be truly accompanied with a sense of the burden of sin, the act of praise with sensations of love and grateful adoration, and the act of supplication with a deep feeling of human necessity and divine compassion. Words without meaning will no longer glide from the lips, but devotion will become, what it had never before been, a "reasonable," and through the merits and intercession of Christ, an "acceptable" service.

Of these facts the sacred writings furnish numerous examples. What but the power of religion, as distinguished from the form, caused Enoch to "walk with God," and maintained in the souls of David, of St. Paul, and various other scripture characters, that sacred communion with "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," of which the scriptures so often speak? We perceive these holy men constantly evidencing that kind of spiritual life which has been already described: we observe them in possession of such heavenly comforts and satisfactions as the mere exterior of religion could not possibly afford. It was the language of their very heart, and is still the language of those who follow in their steps, How may I best glorify God? How may I realize more of the spiritual presence of my Redeemer, and the strengthening and consoling influences of my omnipotent Sanc-

tifier? How may I live near to God? How may I enjoy "the light of his countenance," and how may I best cultivate a spirit of dependence upon him, and of grateful acquiescence in his will? How may I promote his cause in the world? How may I live so as to glorify my Father which is in heaven? In a word, How may I most experience the genuine influence and vitality of religion, as distinct from mere conventional forms and ceremonial observances?

Without, however, considering the Christian character in its full extent, we may learn to distinguish the power from the form by some of those tests which the apostle has laid down in the words already cited at the commencement of these remarks. After specifying a long catalogue of vicious qualities, he concludes with pointedly observing, that persons thus characterized possess the form of godliness without the power. We may therefore infer, independently of other evidence, that those who really live under the power of religion will be remarkable for qualities of a very different kind; that they will *not* be lovers of themselves, that they will *not* be covetous, that they will *not* be boasters, or proud, or blasphemous, or disobedient, or unthankful, or unholy, or without natural affection, or truce-breakers, or false accusers, or incontinent, or fierce, or despisers of those that are good, or traitors, or heady, or high-minded, or lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

It is indeed true, and a truth which must not be forgotten, that every scriptural description of the Christian's exalted character points out rather the ultimate mark towards which his efforts are directed, than conveys an actual estimate of what his enlightened conscience would venture to specify as his own individual progress; but still, if our Lord's assertion be correct, that "by their fruits ye shall know them," we are certainly not to overlook those exterior marks which indicate the presence or absence of internal

principles. But in thus forming our estimate, it is necessary to be sure that we select a standard sufficiently lofty and correct; and should above all things beware of concluding that our religion is more than form, merely from the circumstance of our having been mercifully preserved from the grosser vices of our nature. We must view sin, not as men in general view it, but as our Saviour portrayed it in his sermon on the mount, as extending to the very thoughts, and feelings, and desires. Especially should we consider the state of our minds in reference to those things which, though censured by the scripture writers, and by devout men in general, are far from injuring our reputation in the estimation of the world at large. Saint Paul, in the foregoing enumeration, brings together dispositions of mind the most varied and distinct, yet he predicates of them all indiscriminately, that they indicate the substitution of the form of religion for the power. The proud man, the lover of self, and the lover of pleasure, are classed with the traitor, the incontinent, the truce-breaker, and the blasphemer; not, however, because there are not various shades in the degree of immorality, but because the habitual prevalence of any one evil disposition is not less a mark of the absence of the spirit of religion, than the tendency to an open and flagitious vice. His intention is not to extenuate the evil of those things which are allowedly and grossly wrong, but to show more fully the evil of those also which might otherwise have passed under a specious appearance as almost right. He did not class the traitor and blasphemer with the lovers of pleasure more than of God, in order that the former might learn to think the less of their enormities, but in order that the latter might be aroused from their indifference, by seeing that even their decorous vices place them in the same general class with more open offenders against their Maker.

The very first test laid down by the apostle is one

that applies closely to the subject in question. "Men shall be lovers of their own selves;"—the inference from which is, that where the power of religion exists, men will *not* be lovers of themselves, as far, at least, as religious principle prevails over the corrupt propensities of nature. Indeed, how can *he* admire his own supposedly good qualities who every moment feels in himself an evil principle, which, as far as it remains unsubdued by grace from above, is constantly thwarting the better dispositions of his renewed mind, and, as the apostle remarks of himself, "bringing him into captivity to the law of sin?" The true Christian acknowledges, that whatever he has was freely received; and therefore while he surveys the value of the gift, he learns to love, not himself, but the almighty Giver. It is, in fact, the immediate tendency of that divine principle which constitutes the power of religion to heighten self-love into love to God, and to make the latter the ruling motive of action. The genuine believer, therefore, when in the full exercise of his exalted privileges, feels that, by the divine assistance, he could gladly sacrifice self, and all that is connected with self, for the cause of his Redeemer. The flame thus enkindled spreads around, and loving God, he learns to love his fellow-creatures also. Affection to his Saviour shows itself by affection for those for whom, in common with himself, that Saviour died. He thus becomes united to his species by a thousand new and endearing ties: his affections are expanded and his heart enlarged: every man becomes his brother, so that he would willingly "spend and be spent," not only in the service of his God, but even for the good of mankind; in much the same spirit, though not, perhaps, to the same extent, as the apostle, who was willing to be "accursed from Christ, for the sake of his brethren, his kinsmen, according to the flesh." Self-love is not, indeed, extinguished, but it is elevated to the best and noblest objects: it embraces heaven,

and places its satisfaction in the favor of God. Thus purified, it prompts, not to self-esteem and self-indulgence; but, on the contrary, to every necessary suffering and sacrifice in the cause of God and man, identifying its own gratification with doing the will and submitting to the awards of an ever-gracious and overruling Providence.

The power of religion as distinct from the form may be defined to consist in that renewal or transformation of mind of which the scriptures incessantly teach both the nature and the necessity. That such a renovation or "new birth" is indispensable for the enjoyment of heaven, who will venture to deny, when he considers the character of the fallen mind, and the nature of that celestial world into which "nothing that defileth" can obtain admission? The company of condemned spirits, who still love sin though they are suffering its punishment, would be more congenial to an unrenewed heart than the purities of heaven and the spiritual felicities of an angelic world.

Yet, on the other hand, it is very possible to find, even in the present day, persons whose minds are already attuned, as it were, for the enjoyment of a future state; persons to whom religion is a continual source of happiness and expectation, and who appear never so much to enjoy existence as when the blessings of the gospel are immediately present to their minds. Yet there was a time when *they* also loved the world, and when God was not in all *their* thoughts. Whence then the happy change? Why are they more willing to die, and better prepared for death than before? Why has the world ceased to engross them, and why have their thoughts assumed a more heavenly direction? What has infused such energy, and spirit, and enjoyment into their prayers and services; and what has expanded their hearts in tenderness and compassion towards their fellow-men? The answer is not distant;—the power of religion has been added to the

form; and they have begun really to experience and enjoy the genuine effects of what was before nothing beyond a decent succession of superficial observances.

For the sake of practical illustration and instruction, it may not be useless to show the sort of process which oftentimes takes place in the human mind in its progress from formal to real religion. There is, indeed, great danger on this subject of systematizing far too much, and thus of reducing piety to a precise series of mental operations; yet, on the other hand, if there be in reality such a process as that renewal of mind which is described in scripture as necessary to salvation, there must have existed certain definite, if not strongly-marked gradations between the incipient steps and the ultimate attainment. Let us then suppose the case of a formalist in religion, of a person by no means vicious in his conduct or heterodox in his creed, but on whom Christianity, notwithstanding its admitted excellence, has produced no very decided or remarkable effect. This is a case of probable and frequent occurrence; and in viewing it more closely, let us endeavor to observe whether there may not be more than fancy in the renovation which has been supposed. Men, in general, are sufficiently willing to allow of the propriety of a reformation in a person of profligate habits, but they cannot discern what change can take place for the better in a man of virtuous and regular deportment. He attended divine worship, he was sober, and just, and charitable, and in the sight of the world at large "was a really good man."

So far it is well: but suppose that by reading the scriptures, by the conversation of a religious friend, by the public ministry of God's word, by the confessions of his own church, or by some other appointed means of Christian information, he becomes really convinced of those fundamental truths which have been already frequently noticed, especially his personal sinfulness, and the consequent terrors of the divine law;

he now finds, that amidst all his boasted religion, he is in reality a transgressor against God, and that, dying as he is by nature, he can cherish no good or scriptural hope of salvation. He knows that his heart and affections ought to have been set upon things above, yet he feels that so far from this being the case, he has been attached supremely, if not exclusively, to the things of time and the enjoyments of sense, and amidst all his religious professions has been proud, or self-righteous, or insincere, or unholy, or a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.

A person thus opening his eyes to the first principles of genuine religion, is surprised that, notwithstanding his formal profession, he never before perceived things which now appear so plain as to enforce the most poignant conviction. The more he surveys himself with his newly-acquired insight into religious truth, the more he feels confused and astonished: he finds himself at once guilty and helpless, and sees no natural means of safety and escape. He trembles at the thought of death and judgment; yet amidst all, he blesses his Creator for having brought him to a correct spiritual perception before it was too late; thus evidencing, by the whole tenor of his conduct, that even already he finds the mere form of religion incapable of sustaining a sinner amidst the convictions of an enlightened conscience.

Thus far sensible of his sinfulness and danger, he begins perhaps to make various attempts for quieting his mind. Finding, however, the arrow too deeply rooted to be extricated by the common expedients of business, or diversion, or company, he recurs to that new species of formality which our spiritual enemy is ever ready to suggest, as an adequate remedy, namely, a Pharisaic reformation instead of a genuine conversion. He begins to imagine, that if he change his life a little for the better, by becoming somewhat more charitable, by repeating his prayers somewhat more

often, and by other similar and equally superficial performances, he will become justly entitled to those blessings which his former course of action was insufficient to ensure.

Soon, however, he begins to find his best resolutions broken, his holiest deeds contaminated, and his heart still radically corrupt. He now, perhaps, advances to the important discovery of something more being required for human salvation than any imperfect obedience which the best of fallible men has it in his power to bestow. Were he even to become, (which, however, he finds impossible,) perfectly good and holy from the present moment, he could not by this means necessarily claim oblivion of his past transgressions. The more therefore he views his case by the unerring light of revelation, the more awful it appears. His judge is God, who seeth the very secrets of the heart, and from whose justly-provoked anger there is no *natural* mode of escape; so that, by the fair deductions of right reason, the conscious sinner can perceive nothing but what is unsatisfactory and alarming.

Now, even in this painful state of mind, there is sufficient evidence that Christianity has ceased to be a mere form: it has not, indeed, yet produced its ultimate and happiest effect, but it has evidenced its power by causing a salutary wound, which nothing but its own influence, under the direction of its almighty Revealer, can effectually heal.

The more awful parts of revelation having thus ceased to be matters of form, its promises and blessings will undergo a similar operation. While it was nothing more than a vague unmeaning ceremony to confess, what we did not feel, that "we have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep, and that there is no health in us," it could not but be a subject of equal indifference to learn that Christ Jesus came expressly "to seek and to save them that were lost." To those who "trusted in themselves that they

were righteous," it must have appeared quite superfluous to be told of the Redeemer's being "made unto us righteousness," and of our being made "the righteousness of God in him." While our confessions of sin, and our professed fears of eternal punishment were merely verbal forms, the promises of God to the penitent believer must have been correspondingly lowered in our estimation; and while, notwithstanding the expressions uttered by our lips, we preserved in our hearts a high sense of the meritorious nature of our imperfect observances, it could be little more than a grave mockery to be informed that mankind can be redeemed only by the blood of Christ, and justified only by faith in him.

But the threatenings of revelation having now been made by the Holy Spirit to assume their just importance, and the humbled penitent having seriously felt his danger, and the insufficiency of his own best deeds to merit salvation, the remaining truths of the gospel are no longer subjects of indifference or contempt. It ceases to be a mere submission to customary forms that induces him to read that holy volume, and attend those sacred services by which he learns that the law which he had broken has been honored, and the punishment which he had deserved has been sustained. It is not to him any longer an uninteresting or unaffecting truth, that although man has "destroyed himself," yet "in God is his help." He was once content with a simple recognition of the fact; but he now desires also faith to enjoy the blessing. It is not enough to ascertain, as a general truth, that mercy is offered; he wishes to bring the subject to bear upon his own individual case, that what he knows to be correct as an abstract proposition, he may find to be consolatory and influential as a personal concern; for it often happens to a penitent of tender conscience, that many things which he allows to be true of every one else, he can scarcely venture to assume as applicable to himself.

That very holiness and renovation of mind which constitute the best pledge and proof of his being a genuine Christian, are at the same time the very causes of diffidence and oftentimes of distress; for the more the power of religion predominates over the form, the greater will be the dread of insincerity and self-deception.

The Divine Spirit is not, however, an uninterested spectator of the progress of that religious feeling which he himself has implanted; and since he wounds only that he may heal, it follows that wherever he has made the threatenings of Christianity effectual in producing a salutary sorrow for sin, he will ultimately make its promises conducive to a well-grounded and permanent repose. The Christian thus far advanced, has evidently become "a new creature:" his heart is changed: sin, which was once his delight, is now his burden: he recoils from it, as being that which is contrary to his better nature, and which was the direful cause of his Redeemer's sufferings: he desires to be entirely freed from its influence, and rejoices in the anticipation of heaven, not solely as a relief from eternal punishment, and an entrance into eternal bliss, but because he shall there be forever emancipated from sin and temptation, from the seductions of an evil heart, and the fascinations of a deceitful world.

The power of religion will now have subverted some of the dearest opinions and prepossessions of the unrenewed heart. The supposed individual has become in his own view a being fallen, yet redeemed; deserving wrath, yet enjoying favor; exposed by sin to the pains of hell, yet rendered heir, through his Saviour, to the felicities of heaven. His daily wish is to know the will of God, and his daily endeavor is to perform it. Scripture has become to him the most interesting of books, and religion the most important of concerns. The affairs of eternity are ever prominent in his thoughts, and produce a corresponding influence upon

his conduct. He venerates the Almighty as his Creator, he feels grateful to him as his Preserver, he fears him as his Parent, he loves him as his Redeemer.

Thus various sentiments arise in his mind with regard to God, which were not there by nature ; nor are his views in reference to himself less conspicuously changed. He is no longer, in his own conception, that lofty being who looked to himself with pride and admiration, trusting to his own efforts, and boasting of his own inherent claims. He confesses himself to be a corrupt being, who, if saved at all, must be saved by free mercy ; and while, perhaps, the world around is wondering at the change in his character, and thinking that he now imagines himself the best and most holy of men, he is secretly lamenting his defects, and pouring out his soul at the throne of mercy for acceptance and forgiveness solely through the merits of his adorable Redeemer.

Having traced the power of religion thus far, it would be easy to carry the delineation much farther. But for the purpose now intended it is not necessary to describe the advanced Christian : it is enough if it have been shown that even the first steps in religion presuppose far more than is usually included in the idea of modern Christianity. True religion implies a complete revolution of character, and a dereliction of many of the most natural feelings and opinions of an unsubdued mind. Its effects have been already faintly sketched as they appear in the general tenor of a Christian's life, but they will be most conspicuous and interesting in circumstances of peculiar difficulty and distress. In trouble, there will be a calm, a resignation, an acquiescence, which no natural considerations could possibly have produced. In death, there will be a well-grounded trust in God, very different, on the one hand, from the despair of him who is " driven away in his wickedness;" and, on the other, from the false confidence of him who " hath no bands in his

death." Above all, the power of religion will be evident in preparing its possessor for that world which, as has been already observed, a wicked man not only cannot attain, but could not even enjoy; that world of which purity is at once the characteristic, the privilege, and the delight.

SOURCES OF ERROR IN OPINION.

It would be sometimes useful, both in order to substantiate a correct opinion, and to detect a false one, to ask the simple question that occurs, for example, at finding ourselves possessed of a suspicious bank-note; "How came it into my possession?" If the source be either doubtful or unknown, our opinion or our bank-note, as the case may happen, demands a careful investigation, for the purpose of ascertaining its authenticity. Men do not materially object to those human laws which render us liable to a legal process for being detected with a forged paper in our possession, even though they know that in many cases it might have been our misfortune and not our crime; still less therefore can we censure the justice of our Creator in punishing us for essentially false opinions in religion, which might have been corrected by the diligent use of the means of Christian information.

When upon examination the source to which we retrace our opinion or our bank-note (for the analogy still holds good) is found to be wholly unexceptionable, we must not hastily throw it aside, to please the first person who chooses to affirm that it is false. A doctrine or precept evidently derived from the volume of inspiration should satisfy our minds much in the same manner as a note which we remembered having received immediately from the bank from which it purported to issue.

Were we thus at all times accurately to retrace the steps by which we first arrived at any particular conclusion, it would be of inestimable use towards es-

timating the value of our sentiments. At one stroke half of the false and absurd opinions which infest the world would be swept away. They could not sustain the cool inquiry, "How were they derived?" Our assent would, in future, be proportioned to the evidence produced. We should deliberate calmly, and decide with moderation. Error would melt away, while truth would receive the utmost increase of stability and vigor.

Imagine, for instance, that an intelligent North-Briton, who believed in second-sight almost as firmly as in the truth of revelation, should begin to retrace his ideas upon these subjects to the fountain-head, endeavoring to conduct his investigation with the unsparing impartiality of a neutral inquirer; what would be the result? His first conclusion would possibly be, that as far as concerned himself, both points rested upon exactly equal and similar ground, the mere prejudice of education. Were he to stop here, his religion would suffer just as much as his superstition, and both would lie expiring by a mortal wound. But the next step rectifies the whole. He believed in second-sight by the force of education; and having discarded this prejudice, he finds no rational ground for his opinion. But Christianity he perceives is founded upon evidence, and assumes new claims to credibility in proportion as his scrutiny is more severe. The same process therefore that melted away the dross, would serve only to purify the gold. The wheat would become more valuable, by being separated from the chaff.

It is not, however, always practicable thus to retrace our opinions to their original source, and to ascertain upon what evidence they originally reposed. We oftentimes resemble an aged traveller, who knows that he once visited a certain spot, though he has long lost the manuscript that described his journey. Whether he arrived by water or by land, on foot or in any vehi-

cle, is perhaps irrecoverably forgotten; so that he can assert only the unconnected fact of his having certainly been there. A person believes, for instance, that there once existed such an individual as the intolerant Queen Mary; but in what manner he first formed that opinion, he is wholly unable to determine. The fact was probably mentioned to him at a time of life when he was ready to credit the most extravagant fairy tale; so that had he never received subsequent evidence on the subject, he would hardly have failed of classing the fiction and the fact together, and of supposing, that because he had been deceived in the one he was equally so in the other also. The application of these remaks to higher subjects is too obvious to need illustration.

A man of thought, while reflecting upon the mutations of character and the fluctuations of opinion in the world around him, will sometimes look back to observe how his own sentiments were imbibed, and his own character matured. He will thus endeavor to ascertain upon what evidence his opinions rest. In making his retrospective observations, he will soon perceive that the revolutions of empires are not more surprising than the changes which have taken place in his own bosom. He is not the same being he was some twenty years ago.

But should he revert to the faint remembrance of past days, and endeavor to realize long-forgotten incidents, hoping to discover by what process his mind was formed and his habits of thinking matured, he will soon find himself enveloped in the clouds of darkness and confusion. He discovers that he possesses a thousand opinions for which he can assign scarcely any possible reason. He makes use of the theorem, but has forgotten the demonstration; or, to recur to a former allusion, he finds himself in possession of the note, but knows not whence it was derived. For instance, he has grown up perhaps with an aversion to a

particular individual or a particular opinion, utterly unconscious in what manner it was originally conceived. It was possibly a mere trivial accident in his childhood, that caused his present feeling; so that could he divest himself of prejudice, and form his ideas anew, that offensive individual or opinion might, under his present circumstances, prove eminently congenial to his own state of mind. Yet he dislikes, he knows not why; as persons taught in their infancy to dread the gloom of midnight, oftentimes retain the feeling to the very end of life, without remembering how it was first impressed, or by what means it has been still continued.

The philosopher thus reviewing the formation of his mind and character, resembles an aged linguist, who should attempt to recollect in what book or company he first became acquainted with each word which he has been so long accustomed to consider as his own. He will find that most of the gradations of his mind and opinions were unmarked; that they were sometimes too minute to attract observation, and sometimes too distant to be regained by memory. In retracing the current of life, he would observe with astonishment what new qualities it had imbibed from the various soils over which it had glided, and the different rivulets with which it had mixed. Every new association of thought, every book which he had read, every friendship that he had formed, every company which he had entered, every event which he had witnessed, had, in some degree, tended to model or confirm his present character. The exact feelings of childhood and infancy could not indeed be retraced: every attempt to recal them would be but grasping at a dream. A momentary glimpse, it is true, might sometimes be obtained; but before a perfect image could be formed, the illusion would vanish, transient and obscure as the shadows of evening.

Yet from what *could* be recalled, he would ascertain

that scarcely one feature of resemblance now remained; that every day, as it fostered his growth and matured his reason, had insensibly modified his character; and that every region of his mind had undergone frequent revolutions by the recession of former inmates and the introduction of new ones.

It must not, however, be supposed that our philosopher would start from his reverie, without having learned some useful rules of conduct, and happily there are two important ones which obviously result from the preceding speculation.

The first is the necessity of opposing every thing vicious or absurd at the very entrance. His mind having been perpetually, though gradually changing, he infers that it may continue to change; and dreads to reflect that when he again takes a retrospect of himself, he may perhaps discover that some good impression has been imperceptibly obliterated, or has given place to one of a very different character. It may be with his mind as with the index of his watch, which has completely veered round, though he never once perceived it move. When therefore he considers with what facility every new idea, however disgusting at first, becomes naturalized in the mind, and what unforeseen effects it may afterwards produce upon the feelings and the conduct, he will be anxious to exclude every thought that may possibly, however remotely, tend to mislead his understanding or corrupt his heart. Every page of history affords evidence, as decisive as it is lamentable, of the astonishing growth of evils which, if attacked in time, might have been effectually suppressed.

Revert, for example, the disgusted eye from Massalina the slave of impurity, to Massalina the modest virgin, guarded by youthful delicacy, and thoughtless of her future guilt. Trace in imagination the intermediate gradations. How slow! yet how silently progressive! Behold her gliding from unshaken inno-

cency to hesitating reluctance; thence to trembling concession; thence, by a thousand shades of progression, to familiarity with vice; and thence, by more rapid stages, to avowed licentiousness, to publicity of guilt, to exultation in her disgrace.

Our philosopher's second rule of conduct would be of a somewhat different kind. Perceiving in how imperceptible and unsuspected a manner many of his opinions have been formed, he will not be ashamed frequently to review them, in order to distinguish between what is simply the result of prejudice or custom, and what has been deliberately adopted by subsequent investigation.

It is frequently possible to conjecture with tolerable accuracy the opinions and feelings of an individual by knowing the circumstances of his life. We are indeed scarcely conscious how much oftener our sentiments are formed by exterior objects and events, than by the deliberate efforts of our own minds. How many of the giddy flutterers, the busy worldlings, the indolent voluptuaries, the unmeaning formalists of the present age, taking their measures of Christianity from surrounding and defective examples, imperceptibly conclude that they themselves are good Christians, and in consequence, close up every avenue by which the light of conviction might break into their minds. Were they but candidly to inquire, "How were my religious opinions formed?" they would find that the volume of inspiration, which they acknowledge to be the only true guide, had little or no share in determining their judgment.

It will be the object of the succeeding remarks to point out several sources of error, which, either separately or in combination, appear to influence almost every person who is not possessed of two very rare qualities, a well-balanced understanding, and a sincerely pious mind. To enter fully into the subject does

not concur with the present design; so that a few of the more frequent causes only will be adduced.

Should the reader of these pages have reason to imagine that his own opinions, (*especially those upon religion,*) have in any measure resulted from the operation of these or similar causes, it will evidently become his duty to raze the tottering fabric, and to rebuild it upon a more rational, and scriptural, and solid plan.

The first cause of error which needs be mentioned is *impatience*. Truth is usually found to be a mean between two extremes. It is simple, while error is infinite; so that an impatient person has no more probability of obtaining it than a traveller, at full speed, of discovering a valuable jewel which happened to lie unobtrusively beside his path, amidst a thousand pebbles of similar color and dimensions.

To many minds doubt and inquiry are torture. An impatient man cannot suspend his judgment: indifference or mediocrity does not afford sufficient stimulus to his feelings: every thing must be at first sight superlatively disgusting or irresistibly prepossessing.

A person thus disposed will not often deny himself the unwise pleasure of forming and expressing an opinion upon every subject that comes under his most transient observation. It would be ludicrous, were it not morally distressing, to observe the solemn authority with which he utters his edicts upon topics which he no more understands than an insect the mechanism of a watch, upon the surface of which it has accidentally alighted. He cannot perceive the necessity of a minute induction of particulars in order to deduce a general inference; but seeing a little, and presuming a great deal, he precipitately jumps into a conclusion. It is curious to observe how trifling a proportion the little that is seen sometimes bears to the great deal that is presumed, and to contrast the magnificence of

the conclusion with the apparent poverty of the premises.

To examine every subject upon which we are called to decide is evidently a reasonable duty; but unhappily it is one far removed from the habits of a large portion of mankind. The suspense of investigation is naturally unpleasant, and it is not without much mental discipline that it at length becomes habitual. In religion especially, though a subject of acknowledged importance, the majority, even of persons otherwise well informed, cannot be brought to submit to the restraint of serious inquiry.

To correct our natural impatience of suspense is one great end of scholastic pursuits; and in consequence, those studies which inure the mind to the fatigue of unprejudiced deliberation have always been considered, even irrespectively of their immediate end, as of high importance. But suspense, simply considered, can never become agreeable. It may be familiarized by custom, and made the companion of our highest pleasures, but it cannot possibly be welcome upon its own account. The pleasure, for example, excited in the mind of a novel reader by an intricate plot, or that of a mathematician by an abstruse series of demonstrations, though necessarily connected with suspense, does not arise immediately from it; for if so, how much soever each of these characters might be interested in his subject, he would never desire to arrive at the conclusion, since his pleasure, which, on this supposition, is contemporary with his suspense, and dependent upon it, would be thus entirely destroyed. This, however, is contrary to fact; for who, in the midst of an interesting narrative or argument, was ever known finally to close the volume, in order that the pleasures of suspense might not be lost in certainty? On the contrary, the very desire to arrive at the conclusion may be attributed, in a great degree, to the wish of being liberated from the anxiety of suspense.

It is in consequence of the uneasiness of suspense, that when for a time two questions appear almost equally balanced, expedients the most puerile are sometimes employed to produce an imaginary preponderance. The cast of a die, the wanderings of a bird, the casual opening of a volume, and a hundred other accidents equally trivial and uncontrollable, have been permitted to decide the fate of nations, and to give laws to the sovereigns of the world. The mind wearied with doubt, instead of grasping that side of the question which, upon the whole, appears most correct, sinks supine, and gladly reposes upon the bosom of imagined infallibility.

It appears, then, that one great source of error is that impatience which prevents our calmly discussing a question before we venture to form an opinion. It is so easy upon the one hand to "jump into a conclusion," and so difficult and tedious upon the other to balance opposite probabilities, to unweave intricacies, remove objections, collate rival opinions, detect error, elicit truth, anticipate contingency, pursue causes to their effects, and resolve effects into their causes, that we cannot wonder that the larger portion of mankind should be content with first prepossessions, and anxiously avoid even a temporary suspense of unbiassed examination. A few plausible arguments, a few unsifted facts, are sufficient oftentimes to cause an unalterable decision; whereas the very next argument that was offered, the very next fact that occurred, might have overturned the whole visionary fabric.

It is frequently observed, that persons of unusually lively mind are far from being celebrated for the correctness of their opinions. A man of common thought, who has learned to suspend his judgment, will not often be obliged to retract his positions: but the impatient genius, to whom deliberation is torment, is incessantly employed in obliterating past decisions, or involving himself in new absurdities of error. Till the mind

has been accustomed to patience amidst the tantalizing delays of suspense, nothing of a permanent value can be ensured.

In no instance, perhaps, are our opinions more likely to be influenced by impatience than in judging of character. We see, in a mixed company, two persons, one of whom *appears* generous, intelligent, and manly; the other frivolous, insignificant, and self-conceited.—In such a case, it is impossible not to feel immediately a corresponding predilection or contempt, and not very easy, perhaps, not to hint our opinion to our neighbor. But who can say whether a further intimacy, or an inquiry among those who know their real characters, might not soon convince us that the apparently noble qualities of the one were but natural endowments, which served as a passport to imbecility or pride, if not to incorrectness of moral principle; while that which disgusted us in the other was but a defect in manner, of which the individual was unconscious, or which he had already labored to remove?

It is true, indeed, that we may usually form some idea of a person's character by those common rules of judging, which are insensibly acquired in general intercourse with society. But induction, however extensive, being necessarily partial, will not *always*, when individually applied, answer the purposes of truth: nor should we ever therefore decide upon an unknown character, merely because the person to whom it belongs resembles, in some exterior points, another with whom we are well acquainted. The minute varieties of human nature are so indefinitely multiplied, that nothing but individual experience can be a decisive test. Unexpected modifications of character, novel workings of passion, eccentricities, obliquities, and paradoxes innumerable, will occur upon every side, to confound our most specious calculations.

Truth usually lies at an equal distance from the two extremes of party spirit. It is not often that the book

which we are requested to read is the most useful or the most dangerous that was ever written; that the person to whom we are introduced is the very best or the very worst man in the world; that the institution which we are requested to patronize is either the most useful or the most injurious that was ever set on foot. Yet such possibly were the descriptions of party zeal, and which are eagerly adopted by that spirit of impatience which always loves to form an opinion, even at the expense of reason and of truth.

The sentiments of an honest and wise man, being the result of calm inquiry, will usually incline towards moderation. Having explored the extremes, he will gladly rest in the mean; as the pendulum, after vibrating from side to side, settles at its centre of gravity and remains unmoved.

Another frequent cause of error is what may be denominated *moral reaction*. The prevalence of infidelity upon the continent of Europe naturally arose from those mummeries of superstition which, under the semblance of Christianity, have gone far to ruin its cause, disgusting at once the man of piety by their wickedness, and the man of taste by their absurdity. A person who is required to believe too much, often revenges himself by believing nothing. He sees, for instance, myriads of absurdities arising from the doctrine of transubstantiation, and therefore revolts from the whole system to which this hypothesis is most injuriously appended.

The tendency to this moral recoil is often so general as to become a national concern. We have in our own history a strong corroboration of this remark.—During the time of the interregnum, the religious sentiments of too many zealous partizans had been of a very extravagant nature. The doctrines of revelation had been disjoined from its precepts; so that one half of the Bible became useless, except, perhaps, in the hands of an unusually skilful allegorizer, who had the

art of extracting a merely speculative theorem from the most practical command. The language even of secular intercourse was modelled upon that of the received translation of the sacred volume. The most unchristian acts were described in the most Christian terms. Men thought themselves religious if they used the language of the Bible, however flagrantly they might oppose its spirit. He who could give to a text the most fanciful twist, the most recondite allusion, was esteemed the ablest divine. The union of a sound creed with an irreligious life, of a clear insight into revelation with a neglect of all its duties, had become alarmingly common; so that hypocrisy and the most repulsive affectation were very widely apparent. Even some truly pious men, led away with the error of the times, neglected sufficiently to insist upon several of those essential graces which constitute the beauty of the Christian character; and as for social and moral duties, they were very generally forgotten.

Such was the state of affairs at the Restoration.—Here then was a conjuncture of circumstances remarkably disposed for that moral reaction which ensued, and the effects of which are felt to the present hour. The religionists of the succeeding Stuart reigns, thought, that, in order to be right, they must be as far as possible removed from the opinions and practices of their predecessors. Such was the extraordinary nature of this revulsion, that it is almost wonderful that they did not assert that there was no God, in order to distinguish themselves from the Puritans, who, with all their faults, certainly believed and felt that there was one. Short, however, of this, there was scarcely any thing in which they did not oppose the opinions of the period immediately preceding. It was quite in course that an avidity for public amusements of the most exceptionable kind should become epidemic; that the stage, amidst all its licentiousness, should be frequented as a school for virtue; that profaneness should not only be tole-

rated, but actually patronized and esteemed; because all these things were evidently most pleasant sarcasms upon the strictness of the preceding age. It had been so much the custom to conceal a sinful life under the exterior garb of religion, that men now began almost to take credit to themselves for the openness of their iniquity. To turn the language of scripture into ridicule by impious jests, was esteemed an excellent libel on those men who were accustomed to speak of it with the highest veneration.

All this was very natural: it was but such a reaction as might have been confidently anticipated. But the great difficulty still remained. The pulpit, it might have been thought, was too sacred for a similar experiment. Besides, many of the doctrines which had been taught, even in the most fanatical times, though miserably wrested, and detached, and overstated, were yet *substantially* the doctrines of revelation and of the Established Church. In ordinary circumstances, therefore, it would not have appeared quite decent either openly to oppose, or even silently to suppress them; but so great, at the season in question, was the prejudice against the puritanic age, that every thing else was willingly sacrificed for its gratification. The recoil was fearful. At one undiscriminating stroke, the preaching of a large portion of the established clergy was dismembered of almost all the peculiarities of the Christian dispensation. "Another gospel," which however "was not another," was made to supersede that by which pardon and justification had hitherto been proclaimed to the believing penitent solely through the merits and obedience of the omnipotent Redeemer. Reaction in this case performed more than the greatest direct force. The utmost efforts of infidels to banish from our pulpits the peculiar, but essential, tenets of the gospel, would have been in vain; but the desire of avoiding the manners of an obnoxious party easily produced the effect.

It is to be lamented that our church by this means received a shock from which it has never completely recovered. The dread of Puritanism has been ever since employed by the great enemy of mankind to depress that spirituality and heavenly-mindedness which are the very badges of Christianity. The doctrines of the Bible, and their practical effects upon the heart as well as life, have been too often superseded by mere ethical philosophy; so that had not our public forms remained unaltered, we might, in many cases, almost doubt what had been the religion of our forefathers.

In politics also, the violent and arbitrary principles of the Stuart reigns produced the still more violent counter principles of the leaders of the rebellion; and the excesses of these, in their turn, paved the way for the re-admission of the principles of the Stuarts.

Thus, again, the romantic institution of chivalry possibly originated in an ill-regulated attempt to correct the unreasonable error of the preceding age, in which the female sex had been treated with insult and contempt. The world had not yet arrived at that true medium, which, making women neither, on the one hand, divinities, nor, on the other, beings inferior and subservient to man, had represented them in their real dignity, as his equals, his companions, and his friends.

Thus, again, before the time of the crusades, Europe had silently lain for ages in torpid indifference. This was the season in which men, if once aroused, were in danger of reverting to the most unexpected extremes. They wanted but an incitement; which being supplied by the romantic zeal of Peter the Hermit, they started from their slumbers, grasped their swords, and endeavored to atone for their past apathy, by hurling the crescent from the minarets of Palestine, and involving all Europe and Asia in the horrors of an exterminating war.

In a more recent instance of this reaction, we have seen the citizens of Paris, at one moment, proud of

their slavery to their monarch; the next, exulting with republican fury around his scaffold, and literally rushing to dip their hands in his blood; and again resigning their liberties and lives to a despot.

When, alas! shall there universally prevail some principle of action, pure, efficient, and uniform, to correct the sallies and moderate the passions of ungovernable man?

This reaction is frequently visible in more confined societies. The heir of the avaricious parent often becomes a prodigal; and the youth too austerely educated, bursts the trammels of domestic subjection, and plunges headlong into licentiousness. Who could not point out, among his acquaintance, the relatives of pious individuals throwing off the restraints of a religious education, and openly despising what they had been most instructed to admire? A person of this description might say, "I should perhaps have loved religion, but for the form in which I saw it arrayed. It was incessantly pressed upon me in my infant hours of amusement, not only without any attempt at conciliation, but with all the force of chiding, if not of punishment. Instead of select moments and favorable conjunctures being sought out and embraced, I was daily condemned to the same irksome task, even at times when my mind ought to have been amused with puerile recreations. Besides, I too often observed individuals, who professed to be unusually religious, exhibiting the most unamiable proofs of their want of common meekness and urbanity. The Almighty was represented as a tyrant, and man as a slave. In short, the whole process of my education tended to deprive religion of every lovely association, and to render what was represented as necessary to my salvation, utterly repugnant to my reason and my feelings." Such is the language that is sometimes heard from the apostate children of religious but injudicious parents; and though it cannot justify the speaker, it ought to con-

vince the hearer of the necessity of associating religion, as far as possible, with pleasing rather than painful recollections. A child may and should be taught urgently and frequently all things necessary to his salvation, without, however, having just cause afforded him of complaint for harshness or unreasonable demands. Nothing is more to be dreaded than this moral reaction. It is as much the object of a judicious preceptor to teach a child to love the Bible as to make him understand it: nay, more; for love will soon lead to knowledge, but knowledge is of no avail without love.

Another cause of error is mental *imbecility*. There are persons who, for whatever reason, seem utterly unable to draw moderate and equitable conclusions. They are the dupes of every new speculation. The slightest argument impels them to the most absurd opinions. The singularity of a proposition, far from exciting their suspicion, serves only to confirm their belief. They are always wrong, always in extremes, yet always imagine themselves right and reasonable, and are surprised that others do not see the force of what to them appears so obviously true. It must not, however, be imagined that the class in question is composed only of thoughtless or illiterate minds. The imbecility that is intended to be described is compatible, though in a subordinate degree, with a very high order of general intellect; for even the most learned and sagacious men have been sometimes seen conscientiously to embrace opinions which a well-informed child would be ashamed to own.

There are persons who seem to think rightly upon every subject, perhaps, but one; as a madman may be found to reason perfectly well, except upon the particular topic that caused his derangement. For there is in many human beings a kind of idiosyncracy, which, independently of pride, or passion, impels them to say, and to do, the most eccentric things. Even the man

of genius is not necessarily exempted from this statement; for there are few opinions so absurd as not to have found sincere advocates even among persons of undoubted talent. How often has one favorite hypothesis led persons, otherwise sensible and well-informed, to a train of the most extravagant conclusions! There are writers who, having by some unaccountable imbecility admitted one error, which runs, like a black vein in a block of Parian marble, through the whole of their argument, have rendered their otherwise masterly works almost entirely useless. Without selecting an extreme case, the learned and highly valuable commentary of Hammond might be brought forward as an illustration. It is amusing to observe how gravely he introduces us to our old enemies the gnostics, and without a syllable of parley begins the favorite attack; and this at a time when we least expected their company, and hoped to have passed comfortably on without a single blow on either side. In such a case as this, the defect in judgment may by no means lead to any errors of a very dangerous nature; but instances might easily be produced in which a similar cause has tended to the most injurious results.

The predominance of fancy over the judgment produces a peculiar species of mental imbecility. To this may be attributed many of the improprieties of the mystic writers. The strange explications of scripture, which have sometimes amused or astonished the world, may be traced, when they do not spring from pride, to this same source. The powers of the fancy may be so strong, and under such slight regulation, that a person who possesses common sense sufficient for ten other men, may not have enough for himself. To what but the influence of this giddy deity over the more sober decrees of the judgment, can be ascribed the eccentric opinions of the amiable Bishop Berkley? To charge such a man with general imbecility, would be absurd; yet could any speculation be more imbe-

cile than that of the nonentity of matter, and the immateriality of all visible scenes? One string, we find, may jar in a mind the most harmoniously arranged.

There is an unfortunate species of imbecility which displays itself in a constant change of opinions, and that perhaps for others equally unworthy of belief. Occasional corrections ought not to stamp a character with the imputation of mental weakness. They may occur in the best regulated mind in consequence of a new influx of light and knowledge, and in such cases are often successive approximations towards truth. But widely differing from this, is that idle restlessness which can never be satisfied but by the charms of novelty. Persons under this influence not only change often, but with the most unmeasured violence. They never repair without pulling down; they never forsake their present error without reverting to the opposite. Their scale is graduated only for the widest excesses of apathy and passion, of heat and cold.

To treat with ridicule or contempt those unhappy persons whose erroneous opinions arise from either total or partial imbecility, is not only cruel but useless; for if we would reduce them to moderation, it must not be by shocking their minds with harsh assertions, but by acting towards them with unaffected kindness and mild expostulation. Thus may we silently, but effectually, turn aside the helm, and deflect their course from the rocks of Scylla, without exposing them to the dangers of Charybdis.

Controversy is another source of error; and it is astonishing to observe in how forcible a manner it sometimes operates. Its peculiar effect is to give undue prominence to the controverted point by the exclusion of almost every other; so that through its influence the best arranged system often loses the beauty of its proportions.

A man, whose opinions have been quietly formed, will usually find that each point is more or less con-

spicuous in his system, according to its intrinsic consequence. But no sooner does he issue forth into the field of controversy, than this equitable balance is in imminent danger of being destroyed. The particular doctrine that is attacked instantly becomes a favorite, as an afflicted child is usually preferred to all the rest. The very habit of defending a point invests it with unwonted importance; so that it is scarcely possible to open a polemical work, without being informed that the subject under consideration, whatever it may be, is about the most momentous that was ever discussed. The writer was possibly at one time as indifferent to it as his reader; but the constant act of defending his position has impressed it upon his mind with a power not its own. He has every moment perceived some new argument in its favor; and has been equally sagacious in discovering the ill effects of the system of his adversary. Thus has he proceeded, till his favorite tenet has eclipsed all others. Symmetry, which is as indispensable in a system of opinions as in an architectural design, is entirely forgotten. His descriptions become harsh and overcharged; so that what was perhaps substantially true and laudable, is rendered false and dangerous by his distortion and extravagance.

To this natural effect of controversy may be ascribed many of the unguarded statements even of pious and learned men upon subjects connected with religion. Perceiving, perhaps, that some particular scriptural doctrine was much neglected, they have felt it necessary to show its importance; but while they have eagerly pursued this laudable end, they have forgotten the equal importance of all the rest. In arguing against a common error, strong language must sometimes be employed; nor can we wonder if this language is sometimes stronger than the occasion requires. Were we to judge of the relative importance of the thirty-nine articles of religion by the controversies which have ex-

isted upon the subjects therein discussed, we might imagine each one in succession to have been the most important; for controversy disturbs the natural order of distances and magnitudes. The individual truth, the insulated error under consideration, occupies the whole sphere of vision, so that other truths and other errors of equal or superior importance are in danger of being overlooked.

These effects of controversy, though highly injurious, may unconsciously consist with the most innocent intentions; but there are others equally common which always involve actual guilt. It is impossible to survey the annals of literary or theological warfare without discovering, even amongst the best of men, something too much resembling obstinacy or prevarication. A controversialist may begin moderately, but he seldom ends so. Heated with opposition, he tries to remove himself as far as possible from the opinions of his opponents. He finds it necessary to go to greater lengths than he intended, in order to defend what is undoubtedly true. "If I am obliged to give up this, I must give up more." So powerful is this cause of error that an obstinate man would almost refuse his assent to the postulates of Euclid, if he suspected that they might be made use of to refute his favorite opinions.

The last, but not the least prolific source, that needs be mentioned, is pride. This is closely connected with several of the foregoing causes, and without it they could not always exist. But independently also, and distinctly, it has a most extensive and energetic effect.

An ambitious man who cannot attract attention by superiority of talent, will often endeavor to do it by singularity of opinion; for he who is unable to surpass others in illustrating known truth, may easily become conspicuous by some novelty in error. Hence most of the wild theories, paradoxes, and speculations, that infest the world. It is scarcely possible to find a very eccentric book in which there are not evident indications

of pride. The unusual opinions, for example, of Bishop Warburton are remarkably characterized by this quality; indeed, so much so, that it may be fairly suspected that pride was often the reason why they *were* unusual. A still more forcible illustration may be derived from almost every work published by our modern pseudo-philosophers. Nearly the same principle that inclines one person to comply with every modish sentiment of the times in which he lives, induces another to resort to the contrary extreme of opposing whatever he finds established by public opinion. The pestilent philosophers of modern days have acquired much celebrity by this easy practice. They have railed against the most important institutions, without offering any thing of equal value in their place; as the ambitious incendiary, who could not perhaps build a hovel, hoped to become illustrious by consuming the temple of Diana.

Since, however, all proud men cannot invent new systems of opinion, many are content with adopting the absurdities of others; being perhaps aware that some sentiments are so eccentric and unlikely to be generally admitted, that the imitator becomes almost as conspicuous as the original artist. There are persons whose pride hourly leads them into erroneous opinions, by prompting them to differ from every body else; so that where others are right they must necessarily be wrong. Their politics, their religion, their literature, must possess something new and remarkable. They court opposition for its own sake. To judge of their opinion upon any given subject, it is necessary to inquire what is *not* the opinion of ordinary men. They are afraid of being considered tame characters. They are too proud to profess the same creed with their pious neighbors. No sentiment can recommend itself to their judgment that does not also gratify their love of notoriety.

To enumerate other sources of error would increase

the number of these remarks beyond the intended design. Prejudice, education, love of pleasure, the passions, and various other causes, might, however, be mentioned, as not less extensive and powerful than those already detailed. But the object of these hints was chiefly to suggest a few practical ideas, in order to assist in answering the very important question, "How came I to possess such or such an opinion?" If conscience reply, that the grounds on which it rests are improper or insufficient, the line of conduct that ought to be pursued is too obvious to need recital.

FALSE MODESTY IN RELIGION.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

It is by no means a subject for astonishment that men should have been ashamed of Christianity at its first promulgation. The Messiah had just suffered crucifixion, which was a mode of punishment confined to malefactors and the lowest classes of society: his followers were persecuted from city to city with the most implacable and cruel bigotry, and every thing was practised to bring the gospel into disrepute. It cannot therefore excite surprise, that persons in general, and more especially the proud, the rich, and the learned, were ashamed of the new dispensation. But in the present day, when Christianity has long been patronized as the religious code of the most enlightened quarter of the globe, when its evidences are acknowledged to be irresistible, and its blessings of infinite value, it is surely astonishing that men should be ashamed of so inestimable a blessing. Yet the more we inquire into the subject, the more we shall discover this to be the fact.

To a man who believes Christianity to be a system "generally necessary to salvation," it is distressing to reflect over how small a portion of the world it is yet diffused. Amidst the vast tracts of Africa, Asia, and America, scarcely is it known, except in the different European colonies. But from these desolate scenes let us turn our eyes to those brighter spots on which the light of revelation has shone. Christendom may present a more animating sight. Yet, alas! though the spiritual sun is indeed visible over the whole of this extensive tract, he too often appears "shorn of his beams," and enveloped in the clouds and darkness

of error. Superstition (and what superstition can be more degrading to the gospel or to the human intellect than that of the unreformed church?) has obscured the light of genuine Christianity. In some few countries, however, the gospel is professed in its purity, and amongst those our own holds the most conspicuous place. Nothing can be more spiritual, or scriptural, or worthy of the highest intellect and understanding, than the worship of the Church of England. Yet were the great Author of our religion orally to reveal his mind to us as he did to Saint John, he might say of us, as he said of the Ephesian church, "Nevertheless, I have also something against thee." For is it not a fact rather to be lamented than denied, that a large portion, not only of those who vaguely call themselves Christians, but of those who zealously profess themselves members of the pure and apostolical church established in these realms, are, in reality, ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Since, however, this charge is of a most weighty, and apparently an invidious, nature, it becomes necessary to inquire into the evidence upon which it depends.

At the first promulgation of Christianity, the mere recognition of it as a religious system was sufficient to draw down the utmost violence of persecution. The number of merely nominal professors was therefore comparatively small; for few persons would go so far as to acknowledge Christ Jesus as their teacher, and thereby make themselves partakers of his reproach, who did not intend to go further, by fully admitting his doctrines, and leading a life strictly consistent with his commands. But in the present age and country the case is widely different; a general belief in Christianity is rather a source of reputation and credit, than of censure or opposition; and by no means necessarily supposes any great sacrifice or privation for the sake of our nominal Redeemer. Merely to say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," costs *us* nothing.

We run no risk, incur no odium, raise no suspicion. Being born within the limits of Christendom, it is considered a thing of course that we should not verbally deny our titular Lord. All the prejudices of our country and our education concur to make Christianity, as a system, respectable in our eyes. Except, possibly, in some few licentious pseudo-philosophical circles, not to be a Christian, in the common acceptation of the term, is never spoken of as a claim to honor or applause. It is therefore very possible to deceive ourselves in supposing we inherit the apostle's spirit, merely because we can literally adopt his words, forgetting that the circumstances under which we repeat them are essentially different. It is little to assert that we are not ashamed of that to which no mark of shame is ever thought of being attached. Many who in the present century name the name of Christ in Great Britain, would have opposed it, had they been contemporaries of the apostles in Judea or Asia Minor. It is evident, therefore, that the bare acknowledgment of Christianity in a Christian country, is a very insufficient test of our religious character. We have seen, not many years since, in a neighboring nation, whole bodies of men who professed the name of Christ, and who were possibly as much attached to his religion, and on the very same grounds, as many nominal professors of it among ourselves, becoming ashamed of it as soon as it ceased to be countenanced by the distributors of emolument and patronage! This is surely an important fact, warning us to ascertain whether our religion is merely the unexamined prejudice of education, or that internal principle which enabled Saint Paul to submit to every opposition rather than renounce his Lord.

From these remarks it will appear, that in examining whether or not we are "ashamed of the gospel of Christ," we should look beyond the unmeaning recognition of Christianity which the worst as well as

the best men around us will readily profess; and should consider the apostle's words in an extended view, as including the whole of a genuine Christian's belief and practice, not only as distinguished from that, for instance, of a Mahometan or infidel, but from that also of the ignorant and irreligious of his own nominal persuasion. Admitting this, it becomes, alas! too easy to show that many professed Christians are, in reality, ashamed of the "Cross of Christ." Nor is it necessary to advert to the licentious and profane, as examples of this truth. We find it oftentimes exhibited in persons who possess far greater claims to our respect—in the decorous, the moral, the benevolent, the sincere.

Let us, as an example, select a character, such as is often seen in the more decent ranks of life, of a person taught by education and custom to respect Christianity, and perhaps confirmed in his veneration by observing the unrivalled moral excellence of its effects. At divine worship his attendance is regular, and his conduct exemplary. In his worldly affairs he is punctual and just, in his temper mild and amiable, in his alms liberal yet judicious, in his general conduct, upright and sincere. He even perhaps ventures further, willingly lending both his influence and his property to promote Christianity, and education, and good morals amongst the ignorant and destitute. Of a person thus well disposed, it cannot but be painful to speak otherwise than in the language of unqualified approbation. The hand of candor would willingly draw a veil over every thing that might cast a shade on so lovely a picture, were not this falsely-kind office inconsistent with true Christian charity.

Should such a person as has been described be inclined to undertake the important duty of self-examination, accompanied with earnest prayer for the divine guidance in ascertaining his true character, he might possibly discover that amidst so much that is laudable

there is much also that is wrong, and that how praiseworthy soever may be his general conduct, he, in reality, studiously avoids the reproach of the cross of Christ. It is not necessary that we should deny the divine mission of our Saviour, in order to constitute us enemies of the gospel; for it is very possible that individuals of such a character as has been sketched out, though apparently devout and orthodox, may be justly obnoxious to the same serious charge. The line of conduct which has been described is by no means an undeniable proof of willingness to bear the shame of the cross, since it is evident, that far from being attended with disgrace, it is not unusually the direct road to admiration and esteem. The very same actions would have pre-supposed, in the times of the apostles, a disposition of mind which is by no means their necessary companion in the present day. It is not too much to say, that our conduct may in every thing be externally Christian, without our heart being right in the sight of God. The mere outward acknowledgment of Christianity in this highly Christian land, by no means indicates our real attachment to our professed Lord. Where there is no possible temptation to waver, there can be no exertion of principle in remaining firm. While therefore we are grateful to that beneficent Providence which has placed us in an eminently pious country, and made us subject to no external pains and penalties for our religion, we should be incited to greater rather than less scrupulousness in ascertaining its real effects upon our hearts and conduct.

It is very possible, and indeed very common, to acknowledge Christianity in the gross, and yet to be ashamed of it in detail; to contemplate it at a distance as an object of applause and veneration, but to shrink from any minute examination of its individual parts. We do not hesitate to admit its authority, but we blush to be found living in its spirit. We confess it as our

religion, but do not adopt it as our rule. We unmeaningly pay homage to it on the Sabbath, whilst we contravene its influence during the remainder of the week. It is an outward badge which prevents our being mistaken for Pagans or Jews, but not, as it ought to be, a principle interwoven in our hearts, which distinguishes us from those thoughtless persons who live "without God in the world" among our own compatriots and friends.

If the assertion of our Saviour be true, that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," we may in some degree judge whether or not we are ashamed of the gospel of Christ, by the general tone of our daily conversation. Do we, in our intercourse with the world, habitually refer every thing to this standard? Do we delight to converse on the important realities which are disclosed by revelation; and that not abstractedly as subjects of mere literary taste and argument, but as practically connected with the improvement of the heart and life? Or, on the contrary, do we instinctively shrink from topics thus immediately connected with the cross of Christ, and seek for delight in worldly ones? Does not the passing rumor of the day usually interest us more than the immutable realities of eternity? If religious subjects, strictly so called, be introduced, do we not often prove, by our silence or uneasiness, if not by our contempt, that we are heartily ashamed of their admission? Do we not also evidence this false modesty by representing religion as an unfit theme for habitual meditation, or conversational intercourse, and as calculated only for admission into pulpits and theological books; thus completely dissenting from the general spirit of the early Christians and of our own pious forefathers, who were never ashamed, as often as proper occasions arose, to join in strictly devotional conversation. Awe for religion is the assigned cause; but indifference to it, and a desire to avoid it, are the real ones, why it is almost

banished from modern intercourse. Men are not ashamed to speak of the existence of a Deity, or to converse upon any other subject of what is called natural religion; but no sooner are the *peculiarities* of the gospel introduced, than our false modesty, or rather our active dislike is excited, and we strive to put an end to the discussion. To a professor of another religion, we must oftentimes appear like a company of persons, who, for some unknown or unworthy motive, have determined to support, in the eyes of their neighbors, a system of which each is secretly ashamed, and which, therefore, all agree to banish from general conversation, and to confine to certain stated periodical formalities, in which each may venture to take a share without any distinct charge of credulity being attached to any.

The wise Reformers of the English Church showed themselves well acquainted with our natural propensity to be ashamed of the gospel, when they admitted into the baptismal service those emphatic words, "We do sign him with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil." Yet, alas! how often is their wise precaution rendered vain!—Baptized into the Christian faith, we too often voluntarily and even eagerly yield to those spiritual enemies which by our sureties we had promised to renounce. We are even ashamed of genuine religion in others. An individual may make high advances in moral virtue and religious decorum, not only without his intellect or his sincerity being called into question, but with an evident increase of reputation to both. His motives not being suspected to be exclusively christian, his conduct is applauded and admired. But if he candidly point to the letter of his baptismal engagements as the rule of his conduct;—if he evidence that he is really determined to "fight under Christ's banner against

sin, the world, and the devil," by exhibiting a life of faith, of prayer, of humility, of dependence upon God, of watchfulness against every sin both in the heart and conduct, of eagerness to perform the divine commands, and of determined hostility to those "pomps and vanities of the world" which he has so solemnly vowed to renounce,—do we not instantly suspect him of enthusiasm or affectation; of an imbecile understanding, or a hypocritical heart? Do we not further evidence that we are ashamed of the gospel in its genuine spirit, by silently avoiding his company, if not by more open and direct modes of warfare? In short, are we not willing to applaud every virtue of every man, unless when we perceive it to be the immediate effect of practical faith in Jesus Christ?

In our conduct, it is evident that we are ashamed of the cross of Christ, if we prefer acting by the current maxims of the fallen mind, rather than by the injunctions of the Bible; or if, instead of adhering strictly to our Christian engagements, we study how far we may conform to the spirit of the world, how far we may indulge the "desires of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life," without absolutely forfeiting our claim to the name and privileges of Christians.

An anxiety to avoid that unmerited reproach which, as disciples of Christ, we ought to rejoice to bear, is often perceptible in the most trifling occurrences of life. If, for instance, a worldly gratification be proposed, which, though not, perhaps, verbally condemned by Christianity, is at least inimical to its general spirit—which supposes us to be habitually living as inhabitants of another world, as followers of the humble, holy, and patient Redeemer, and as imitators of those who have been most successful in copying his example,—should we in such a case dare to be singular in avoiding the unhallowed gratification, and candidly assigning as our motive, that it appears to us to be inconsistent with the heavenly spirit of our religion, and a virtual renuncia-

tion of our baptismal vows? Even when we decline the questionable pleasure, it is not unusual to act in such a way as to be conscious to ourselves that we are ashamed of the cross of Christ, at the very time we profess to adhere to his commands. We plead, for example, (and perhaps truly,) indisposition or a pre-engagement, when our duty required an explicit refusal; softened indeed by all the courtesies which enter into the happiness of civilized and polished life, but by no means compromising sincerity and conscience, or disposing our thoughtless friend to believe, that if the intervening engagement had not taken place, if the unfortunate indisposition had not unhappily occurred, there was nothing to prevent our complying with his unchristian request.

Again—we evidence our reluctance to bear the reproach of Christ, if in our own conduct we do not openly act up to our principles; if in our domestic circle we fail to promote, as far as possible, family devotion, the study of the sacred scriptures, and a heartfelt regard to their doctrines and commands; and if in our general intercourse with society we do not conscientiously add our testimony, humble as it may be, to the power and importance of true religion. Men are never backward to applaud virtue and condemn vice, *as such*, because these terms do not belong exclusively to the language of revelation; but *sin* and *holiness*, on account of their reference not only to the outward act, but to the actuating principle, and from their describing our conduct rather as it appears in the sight of God, and as it respects his revealed laws, than as relating to merely moral and political considerations, are usually avoided as suspicious terms by those who do not cordially admit the essential peculiarities of the gospel. It is, however, always a sign of our desire to avoid the shame of the cross, when we studiously neutralize the characteristic doctrines or language of scripture, or attempt to lower down its deeper coloring to the slight

shades of ethical philosophy. If our ideas of Christianity, though they may admit it to be a divine revelation, teach us to regard it rather as the religion of our country, and of great moral and political importance, than as immediately connected with the salvation of the human soul, and the interests of eternity, we admit no more than is awfully compatible with a deliberate disavowal of its most essential doctrines, and a systematic neglect of its most binding precepts;—no more than the prejudices of country and education might be expected to produce on a mind the most hostile to personal religion.

To persons such as have been described in a former part of these remarks, persons whose moral excellence of character makes it truly lamentable that they should be deluded in their religious views, no test, perhaps, is more appropriate than the absence or possession of Christian humility. What, for instance, if the decorous behavior, the regular attendance on divine worship, the integrity, the amiableness, the beneficence which we have admired, instead of being, as they ought to be, the fruits of Christian faith and love, are intended to supersede, or even to co-operate with, that perfect and complete sacrifice and obedience which are exhibited in the gospel as the *only* meritorious cause of our redemption? Must they not in this case prove the fruitful sources of self-complacency and spiritual pride? Will they not oppose the humbling spirit of that dispensation which has made our pardon an act of unmerited grace and compassion—"not of works, lest any man should boast," but exclusively on account of the gratuitous mercy of God in Jesus Christ?

It is lamentable to reflect, as it may appear harsh to assert, that persons of the decorous character just described are frequently more ashamed of the cross of Christ than persons of less exemplary habits. For what is the cross of Christ? Is it not the revelation of free pardon to a rebellious world solely through the

vicarious obedience and death of Christ? Are there any classes of persons mentioned in scripture so naturally good as to deserve being exempted from the universal list of proscription, and for whom therefore the death of Christ was a supererogated work? Or are there two methods of salvation proposed, the one for the profligate, and the other for the moralist? So far from it, we find that he who owed fifty pence was as unable to pay as he that owed five hundred, and the creditor is said to have *freely* forgiven both.

This doctrine, however, though evidently scriptural, is so completely opposed to the natural pride of a man who feels conscious of the outward propriety of his conduct on the one hand, and knows not the extent of the divine requisitions on the other, that it is not often that he can be readily induced to acknowledge its truth. He scornfully rejects the idea of being saved in the same manner as Zaccheus or the thief upon the cross; forgetting that one great and specific end of the gospel was to abase human pride, a sin not less heinous in the sight of God, and ultimately not less injurious to society, than the former extortion or dishonesty of these afterwards repentant characters.

The expectation of being saved either wholly, or in part, upon account of our own merits, derogates essentially from the sufficiency of our Saviour's obedience and death. Our pride indeed seldom goes so far as boldly to set aside the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ; but we virtually produce the same effect by supposing that we already possess much that is good, and therefore need only a *partial* redemption to compensate for our acknowledged deficiency. To this serious error a person such as has been described is peculiarly liable. He sees in himself much that is praiseworthy in the sight of man, but forgets that "his goodness extendeth not unto God." Comparing his actions with those of many of his neighbors, he thinks he perceives reason for self-gratulation and applause;

but were he to examine himself by the standard of God's revealed law, he would soon discover that he has been an ungrateful and unprofitable servant. Can he, for example, assert that his heart has been supremely and undividedly fixed in holy love and devout adoration upon his Maker, which is evidently the great law of his creation? Have every thought, and word, and action been consecrated to his service? Supposing even that his conduct had been uniformly good, without the slightest deflection from the path of rectitude, (a supposition, of course, wholly incompatible with fact, and which arrogance itself will not venture to assert,) yet has it invariably sprung from Christian motives? Has it been always intended to promote the glory of God, and the eternal welfare of his own soul? Has no spirit of pride or worldliness ever mixed with his motives or contaminated his actions? Have love to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ been the predominant principles of his heart, and have they been evidenced in his conduct, by undeviating love for all mankind? Are anger, resentment, and desire of superiority wholly unknown? In a word, taking our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount for his guide, will he conscientiously assert, that he has perfectly complied with God's holy will and commandments in their spiritual import and extent? Surely no man in a Christian country, whose ignorance is not at least as great as his pride, will venture upon such an assertion. We are, therefore, all confessedly guilty before God. Yet while we acknowledge thus much in a general point of view, we often evince our shame of the gospel, by hesitating to admit the scriptural doctrine on this subject in its full extent. We assert that our heart and life, though not perfectly good, equal or exceed the average standard of mankind; and as God is merciful, we trust to the merits of our Saviour to *make up* for our defects.

Does not, however, this language show a reluctance

to admit the unqualified doctrines of that gospel which teaches us to approach our Creator for mercy, *only* through our all-prevailing Mediator and Advocate; feeling that we have offended the Divine Majesty, and acknowledging that no action of our own can possess any legal merit towards procuring our forgiveness? The apostle Saint Paul, perceiving that the idea of our being saved partly by our own works, and partly by the merits of our Surety, was an error highly derogatory to the honor of the Redeemer's sacrifice, and tending greatly to encourage that spiritual pride which Christianity was expressly intended to counteract,—opposed the plausible doctrine with all the force of argument and all the vehemence of zeal. Had he never written more than one well-known sentence, this surely would have been quite conclusive on the subject. If salvation, he asserts, be "by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace: but if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." There is therefore no medium between being saved entirely either by works or by grace: the first, owing to our acknowledged imperfections, is impossible; the latter therefore should be our only hope. To expect salvation by the merits of Christ in conjunction with our own, is to oppose the spirit of the apostle's argument, and evidently indicates a reluctance to submit unreservedly to the humbling doctrines of the cross of Christ.

The reason, perhaps, why persons of moral character so often err on this essential part of Christianity, is, that they do not sufficiently perceive the extent of human corruption. They join indeed habitually in those strong general expressions of sinfulness, guilt, and spiritual impotence, which so frequently occur in the Bible, and its offspring the Liturgy; but they have never considered the awful fact as it relates to themselves. They contend that "their heart is good," forgetting the statement of Omniscience itself, that "the

heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." They seem unconscious that the fall of mankind has so completely changed our moral condition, that nothing we can perform by nature is truly good; or, in the language of our Church, that "works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ." They fail therefore to perceive the necessity of that renovation of heart, that implantation of the "grace of Christ," which, notwithstanding their propriety of conduct, may not yet have taken place, but antecedent to which, no human action is well pleasing unto God, on account of the evil nature of the motives from which it springs.

One error in religion usually depending upon another, we cannot be surprised that those who do not cordially admit the doctrine of human guilt and inability, should be ashamed of another essential part of revelation, the necessity of the Holy Spirit's influences. Conscious that their supposedly good works, which, upon their hypothesis, deserve wholly, if not, at least in part, the rewards of heaven, were the offspring of merely natural motives, they are by no means prepared to allow the declaration of our Article, that "we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

It appears then but too certain that even in this Christian country no small portion of the professed disciples of Christ are, in reality, ashamed of many of the peculiarities of his gospel; and this radical fault we have seen is discoverable, not only amongst the utterly thoughtless and licentious, but among many also of the moral and sincere. To live in the genuine spirit of our profession, emulating the holy conduct of saints, confessors, martyrs, and our Divine Master himself, constitutes no part of the aim of many, who nevertheless

profess to differ widely from the irreligious and profane. False shame of the gospel is a temptation exactly suited to the disposition of those who would be startled at the more open assaults of our spiritual enemy. It is so plausibly veiled under the names of modesty, proper deference to the opinion of others, and a desire of avoiding ostentatious singularity, that we are not always aware of its pernicious influence. A person whose sensitiveness of character, and whose temper and education, incline him to avoid whatever may excite the "world's dread laugh," will find this a most formidable temptation. To certain coarse and wayward minds, singularity, even without any adequate reason, seems to possess intrinsic charms. Men thus inclined, (unless happily restrained by that factitious urbanity which often veils what religion only can overcome,) delight in courting unprovoked controversy. They love to set the opinions and maxims of the world at defiance. They invite noise and controversy, not for the sake of truth, but on account of their inherent attractions; and seem never to enjoy existence more than when surrounded with a circle of auditors who are listening with mingled astonishment and indignation to their affectedly eccentric opinions. The opposition, which to others would be intolerable, is to them but a kind of pleasing stimulus. A man thus naturally or educationally inclined, if he happen to turn his thoughts towards religion, is oftentimes too willing to suppose that he is bearing the reproach of the gospel, when he is only gratifying his favorite propensity, a propensity not less corrupt when employed on religion than when on other objects. He fancies he is not ashamed of the cross of Christ, because he boldly avows his theological tenets; forgetting that he does no more for Christianity than he would do for the most indifferent speculation in politics or philosophy. He escapes, it is true, that "fear of man" which "bringeth a snare;" but he forgets that his victory is owing

rather to the audacity of his brow, and the rigidity of his nerves, than to his real veneration for the holy cause which he defends.

There are persons, however, of a very different temperament, and to whom the corporeal pains of martyrdom itself would be the least part of its terrors. A malicious hint, a reproachful smile, are torture to their minds. Convinced in their judgment that Christianity may be something more than they once conceived, they yet fear the ridicule of being "righteous overmuch," and therefore fail to enter completely into its spirit. They know what is right, but false shame prevents their putting it in practice. The contemptuous smile of an irreligious acquaintance outweighs with them both the force of scripture and the deliberate convictions of their own impartial reason. They dread lest the slightest approximation to primitive piety should subject them to the charge of imbecility or enthusiasm. In a word, they shun the cross of Christ.

But is not this obviously unchristian? Are not pride and worldliness, however variously disguised, its exciting cause? No just plea can possibly be found to excuse so flagrant a violation of our allegiance to our professed Lord: it is a temptation which we are bound to resist. If the peculiar doctrines or spirit of the gospel necessarily excite the frown or suspicion of the world, we must be content to bear them. "One is our master, even Christ." "We cannot serve God and Mammon." We may be courteous, and amiable, and well-bred, without denying or even merging our religious principles. Christian politeness is far removed from hypocrisy. If we would evidence that we do not wantonly affect singularity or oppose the maxims and opinions of men, let it be shown, not by a suppression of the doctrines or practices of our holy religion, but by the sweetness, modesty, and prudence with which we exemplify and inculcate them. We should remember also, for our comfort, that the great-

er the difficulty we find in bearing the reproach of Christ, the greater is our reward if we are enabled resolutely to comply with the obligation.

There is no class of persons upon whom the shame of the cross is more likely to produce a powerful effect, than upon the younger members of amiable, but not decidedly religious families. Having, perhaps, been providentially thrown into circumstances in which they have had an opportunity of seeing a standard of religion more elevated and more resembling the apostolic age than the one to which they had hitherto been accustomed, and having perceived the necessity of more than merely nominal Christianity, a "form of godliness without the power," "a name to live while we are dead," they have determined, by the grace of God, to act up to their conviction—"to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue his faithful soldiers and servants unto their lives' end." As they examine more closely the sacred scriptures, they perceive more evidently that a line of conduct is required widely differing from that of the mere educational Christians with whom they are surrounded. Their judgment is convinced. The doctrines and injunctions of the Bible, not to say of their own church, appear to them so plain, that they cannot withhold their assent. Instructed and influenced by the Divine Spirit, they have been taught to overcome their first natural prejudices against a life of piety, and have felt that to dedicate themselves to their Creator is a delightful as well as a reasonable service. Religion has not only convinced their judgment, but won their hearts. Moral and amiable as their lives may have been, yet perceiving the truth of the scriptural doctrine, that in the sight of God they, like others, are sinners, and deserve his eternal wrath,—they have imbibed the most ardent love and gratitude to their adorable Saviour, who redeemed them with the price

of his own invaluable blood. They have determined, in consequence, by his assistance, to walk in his ways, and to make the concerns of eternity their great object of care in this fleeting world.

Thus convinced, and thus resolved, they begin their Christian course. The glories of heaven are full in their view. The pomps and vanities of the world have become insipid and even hateful to them. They can enjoy nothing that appears inconsistent with their heavenly vocation and their vows of fidelity to their celestial Lord. Their supreme desire is to be holy as God is holy, and perfect as he is perfect. But too soon "the fear of man bringeth a snare." They could, perhaps, have borne the pains of the cross, but they know not how to sustain its reproach. They could brave the open rigors of persecution rather than yield to an unchristian pleasure, or omit a Christian duty; but they know not how to support the tender solicitations or reproaches of mistaken affection, or the raillery, half playful, half severe, of a respected friend. Susceptible and tender, they shrink beneath the cruel charge of unnecessary singularity, if not of hypocritical preciseness; conveyed, perhaps, (to add the more to its poignancy,) by those whom they highly value and revere. They weep while they see friendship and affection, which have hitherto been uniformly exerted for their good, combining themselves with authority which they have always felt it a delightful privilege to obey, in order really, however unintentionally, to pluck them from their Redeemer's hand, and if possible to plunge them into that giddy vortex which their baptismal vows, confirmed and ratified by mature reflection, have taught them to avoid. It is in circumstances like these that the reality of religious professions is brought to the test. The difficulty is often increased when surrounding friends are persons who would not invite to any pleasure, or deter from any duty, except where the voice of general and respectable custom seemed

fully to authorize their conduct. A religious youth placed among persons of openly immoral habits, finds no great cause for embarrassment or hesitation. In shunning them, he not only does not meet with censure, but even gains applause. But among persons of regular, yet not decidedly religious character, it is often quite impracticable to preserve tenderness of conscience, without incurring misrepresentation or reproach; since it is impossible to convey to the world at large those nice susceptibilities of Christianity by which she instructs men to shrink from the very appearance of evil.

In cases of this kind, the reproach of the cross is a most formidable impediment in the Christian course; but formidable as it may be, it must be overcome by all who value the salvation and prosperity of their souls. Great, however, as are the obstacles of this nature which perplex the youthful Christian in the present age, they are unworthy of comparison with those which surrounded the first converts to Christianity. Surely, then, they are not insurmountable by those who inherit any portion of the faith, the hope, the zeal, the patience of the apostolic age, and who, being convinced of the treachery of their own hearts, the mutability of their will, and the feebleness of their resolutions, continually look up to a higher Power for such a portion of the "wisdom of the serpent," and the "harmlessness of the dove," as may enable them to act, on the one hand, with modesty, propriety, and affection, without, on the other, betraying their Divine Master, or shrinking from the honorable reproach of his cross. In cases of doubt, it should ever be admitted as a rule, that God must be preferred to man; and should dim-sighted expediency attempt to suggest modifications or limitations to this rule, we may counteract her unchristian policy by another maxim equally simple and decisive—"Do not evil, that good may come."

It is interesting to conceive the case of an amiable young Greek or Roman, converted by the preaching of St. Paul, and just beginning to bear the reproach of his Redeemer's cross. Imagine him endowed with large mental powers, enjoying a high rank in the scale of society, and heir to all the worldly gratifications which the wealthy and luxurious city of Rome, or Athens, or Corinth, could afford. Attached, however, to the service of his heavenly Master, he finds that no prudence or amiableness can avert contempt or opposition. His dearest relatives, his most intimate associates, not only despise his religious views, but endeavor by every taunting argument, if not by open persecution, to bring him back to the spirit of the world. He feels that he really gives them pain and concern upon his account, and knows not how to prevent it, except by yielding his conscience as the equivalent. What a field for the cultivation of the most difficult Christian graces and virtues! How urgently would the apostle have exhorted such a convert to combine that zeal for God, and that love for his Redeemer, which would prevent his shrinking from the "reproach of Christ," with that meekness, that prudence, that conciliating temper, that patience under injuries and opposition, which conspicuously marked his own character, prompting him cheerfully to become "all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." How earnestly would he have dissuaded him from indulging in angry disputes and contumelious censures, and especially from affecting a tone of superiority over those who might not possess his own degree of spiritual knowledge. How diligently would he have instructed him to pray for that joy and peace in believing, which, displaying themselves in habitual serenity and even cheerfulness of disposition, might convince his associates that Christianity is not the gloomy phantasm of a morbid imagination, but an unfailing source of true beatitude and repose. In a word, how feelingly

would he have enjoined him, as he loved his divine Saviour, and valued his own soul, to cultivate the amiable graces and tempers of the Christian character, acting uniformly with wisdom, humility, and affection, in order "by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

Yet, on the other hand, how urgent and explicit would have been his cautions against spurious candor, unhallowed compliances, and shame of the cross of Christ. His language to the christianized Hebrews is, "Follow peace with all men:" but, as if to prevent their imagining that, in order to obtain it, they might occasionally compromise their conscience, or in any way lower the standard of Christian piety, he immediately adds, "and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord." He would never have permitted temporal interest, universal example, or even the stronger argument of veneration and affection for relatives and friends, to have been urged by his youthful convert, as a valid plea for the slightest infringement on his baptismal vows. Where the duty was clear, he would have yielded nothing whatever to worldly policy or false shame. He could pity weakness, but he would not sanction error: while he admired conciliation, he would have expected consistency.

It is pleasing to imagine what happy effects the humble, affectionate, yet firm and upright conduct of such a convert might produce upon discerning and well-disposed friends. Seeing his good works, they might insensibly learn to "glorify his Father which is in heaven," and to become "followers of him even as he also followed Christ;" for a character correctly modelled upon the principles of our Lord and his faithful followers, is the most powerful demonstration of the beauty and efficacy of religion.

The various evils which result from being ashamed of the gospel are too obvious to need recital. To a person under this unhappy influence, knowledge serves

only to increase guilt, and susceptibility of conscience is but a source of continual pain, by teaching what it does not of itself give power to perform. To avoid the reproach of the cross, men not only neglect positive duties, but commit positive crimes, applauding and practising, for the sake of worldly conformity, what their judgment allows to be wrong, and what their knowledge, if unbiassed by their feelings, would prompt them to avoid.

It may not, therefore, be improper to add a few considerations, which point out the absurdity, as well as the wickedness, of being ashamed of the gospel of our Redeemer.

The most powerful of these, is that which is mentioned by St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." He does not say that he was not ashamed of the gospel on account of its being patronized by the State and connected with honor and emolument, for this was not then the case; nor because it was a powerful instrument of civil order and popular decorum; nor even because of its unrivalled moral excellence, which is usually its highest claim to praise in the opinion of many modern panegyrists of Christianity. Forgetting these minor, though in themselves important considerations, he viewed the gospel at once in its most prominent and most important aspect, as "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." He considered it as the record of the most astonishing events that were ever destined to occur in the annals of eternal ages; as the highest energy of Omnipotence exerted for the salvation of a ruined world. When man had deserved the utmost punishment that God could inflict, his offended Judge became his covenant Father, and devised the most stupendous method of reconciling his own unchangeable attributes with the restoration of his offending child. The eter-

nal and co-equal Son of God, veiling his divinity in the humble garb of our fallen nature, magnified and made honorable the law which we had broken, and became a personal sacrifice for our transgressions. The gospel unfolds these interesting facts. It shows how we may become "sons of God," and "heirs of the kingdom of heaven;" how we may escape eternal punishment, and become entitled to eternal felicity. Such is the religion which we despise;—for surely no despite can be greater than to profess to believe it, while we act as if it were a delusion. We are ashamed——of what? Of a glorious revelation from our adorable Creator, which, amidst the darkness of a dreary world, has burst upon us with celestial effulgence, bringing "life and immortality to light." Seraphs, the most exalted of created intelligences, desire to look into it; while man, for whose benefit it was designed, too often treats it with contempt, professing to believe its truth, while he lives in the habitual violation of its spirit. We do not, it is true, professedly withdraw our allegiance from our Redeemer. We continue to name his name, and denominate ourselves his disciples, yet are ashamed of his most characteristic doctrines, and violate his most essential commands. We blush that men should think we are actuated by a constant sense of the presence of an unseen God, and live in habits of divine communion with our Maker;—that we cherish the most humiliating views of ourselves, as guilty sinners, justly deserving his eternal wrath, and depend for salvation, not upon any supposed merit in ourselves, but entirely upon the obedience and death of our all-sufficient Surety;—that, despising and forsaking the pomps and vanities of the world, we live a life of faith and holiness, of dependence and humility, and resolve "to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Not to be ashamed of the gospel, would not, we might imagine, require any great degree of piety or self-possession. For, is it not, confessedly, a

divine revelation? Is it not consistent with reason? Is it not established by proof? Is it not even admitted (if that were an argument,) by the most exalted human authority? Are not its blessings inestimably valuable, its precepts supremely good, its doctrines ineffably sublime? If, therefore, there be cause for wonder, it is, that we do not make it our constant glory and delight. Not to despise it, is far too little. It must become our rule, our companion, our guide. We must imbibe its spirit, live up to its injunctions, exhibit its effects. We must be firm in the cause of Christ, and pray and labour for this decision of heart and character. The fear of the world, and our natural dread of a contemptuous appellation, are to be overcome. We must learn to glory in Him, who was not ashamed ignominiously to die for us. We must begin to love and serve him here, that we may enjoy his presence and his smile forever hereafter, when the contempt of men shall be forgotten, and the once despised Redeemer of men be all in all.

There is certainly nothing even in the most exalted heights of Christian piety which is irrational, or degrading to the most refined human intellect. Why then are we so often ashamed of the gospel? Evidently because we fear the face of men. We perceive that true religion is despised—that habitual devotion to God, founded upon faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is looked upon as the offspring of a weak mind or capricious imagination, if not of spiritual hypocrisy or pride. Such are the mighty causes that blind our understanding and harden our hearts! But viewing ourselves as rational and responsible creatures, what is there so important in the opinion of frail and fallible men, that we should sacrifice to it our conscience and our hopes for an eternal world? Contempt and ridicule were but a part of those persecutions which the first Christians, and even our own forefathers, were compelled to undergo. How many thousands of per-

sons, not excluding children and numbers of the weaker sex, have consented to wear the thorny crown of martyrdom, rather than deny the gospel of their Saviour! And shall modern Christians be ashamed of that trifling portion of worldly contempt which may fall to their share? Shall we sacrifice our souls for the vain customs of a world which in a few years we must leave forever?

Observe the firmness of Saint Paul. Nothing could daunt his resolution. He gloried in the cross of Christ, though he was ridiculed for it by some of the most polite and learned nations then upon earth, and persecuted by some of the most cruel and implacable. He travelled from city to city, disseminating, amidst the scoffs and taunts of an enraged populace, the doctrines of a crucified Redeemer. To the Greeks, his preaching was foolishness; so that in the long list of his persecutions may be enumerated what, to a man of the apostle's refined education and literary attainments, must have been peculiarly mortifying, the charge of being a weak and ignorant enthusiast. Now, is it not absurd for *us* to profess to be converts to the same religion, while we possess nothing of the same spirit?—If we cannot submit to an idle taunt, how could we have borne these "cruel mockings?"—how could we have "jeoparded our lives unto the death?" If we know not how to sustain the petty vexation of an unceremonious hint, how could we, like the apostle, have traversed the world, promulgating, in defiance of human power and human malice, the doctrines of the cross, and at length sealing the truth of our testimony with our blood? If, when placed in a Christian country, protected by a Christian legislature, and enjoying a national form of worship, (which of itself bears witness to the holy principles and practices of our forefathers,) we shrink from a cordial participation in their tenets, their feelings, and their conduct, and pervert their venerable formularies to the lifeless and unscrip-

tural system of modernized Christianity, what would have been our conduct, if, like them, we had been called to "bear the burden and heat of the day," and to suffer persecution and torture for the sake of our religious principles?

It would be of great service to us often to recall to mind the solemnity of that moment which has been already mentioned, in which we were admitted by baptism into the outward and visible church of Christ. The remembrance is exceedingly impressive; and if in our infancy, though then unconscious of the benefit, we were externally dedicated to the service of our Creator, shall we, when matured in understanding to see the propriety of the dedication, voluntarily exclude ourselves from the proffered blessings?

It may be mentioned as a necessary result of religious consistency, though it does not deserve to be admitted as a legitimate argument, that it raises rather than lowers a character in the sight of the world. Men, even while they ridicule, feel a secret respect which inconsistency can never procure. He who professes to believe the gospel, yet is ashamed of its doctrines and its rules, *deserves*, even by human maxims, a contempt which coherence of conduct would have avoided. There is something manly and noble in an honest avowal of Christian principles, and an undisguised exemplification of Christian conduct; and should there be those, who contemn them in the days of health and strength, they will be among the first to envy their possessor upon a death-bed and in sight of an eternal world.

To profess Christ nominally, while in our hearts we are ashamed of his gospel, is as absurd as it is wicked. It were almost safer to confess ourselves complete infidels, than to act in so impious and inconsistent a manner. We learn to pity the heathen, because they possess not the scriptures, and have not heard of a Redeemer—forgetting how much more severe will be our

judgment, if, having known these things, "we neglect so great salvation."

And what is our motive? Why truly we cannot overcome the fear of man, and are afraid of being esteemed rigid and precise. But if we feel shame now, what shall we feel when all the world is assembled at the last day, and men and angels are witnesses of that sentence which the Almighty Judge shall pass upon those who denied Christ upon earth? The Saviour himself, when incarnate among men, left a warning on this important subject:—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." It is impossible fully to conceive the import of these admonitory words. They show, however, that God will punish men, as it were, by a law of equitable retaliation. As our motive for slighting the gospel is fear of shame, so our punishment shall be "everlasting contempt." But how great the difference! The shame that prevents our living up to our profession is a cowardly fear of mortal man; while the shame which we incur is an eternal "confusion," the mockery of men and angels, and the endless taunts of our companions in destruction. No one will pity, but all will scorn us for our absurd and wicked choice.

The more therefore we reflect, the more shall we see the folly, as well as criminality, of being ashamed of the gospel. It is sacrificing eternity for a moment. Had we the alternative proposed of a long life of honor among men, with never-ending shame and contempt in the world to come, or of a little opposition while we are here, followed by an eternity of that inconceivable honor and glory which are reserved for those who are not ashamed of Christ upon earth, we could not reasonably doubt whether of the two to prefer. And yet, while we are not certain of an hour or a moment, we try to avoid the reproach of the cross of Christ, though

we are conscious it is at the expense of our everlasting interest. The reproach which we desire to avoid would soon end of itself, or we shall be sheltered from it in "the haven where we would be;" but when millions and millions of years are fled, the shame which we so wantonly incur will still be new and still beginning.

As a proof of our unchristian fear of man, were a thoughtless companion at this moment to enter our presence, should we not perhaps be ashamed of the important but humbling reflections that may be passing in our minds, and gaily attempt to smile away our convictions by the levities of worldly conversation, forgetting that instead of an agreeable companion, it might have been one for whose approach we are little prepared, and who even now may be waiting the Creator's signal for admission? At the sight of death, the censure of mortals will be nothing to us—we shall be above them; they will be over for evermore. But when shall the confusion of that man end, of whom the Saviour says, "I will be ashamed of him, when I come in my glory and that of my Father."

As a contrast to these painful, though necessary, reflections, it is delightful to imagine the raptures of the apostle Saint Paul, when he quitted the world, and found himself in the presence of his beneficent Creator. We may conceive him humbly pointing to his epistles, to his labours among the Gentiles, and to the body which he had quitted on earth, still reeking from the axe of the executioner, as proofs that he had not been ashamed of the cross of his Redeemer. But who shall paint his ecstacies of joy, when the glorified Messiah acknowledged him before his Father and the holy angels, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" His pains, his dangers, his sorrows, would be forever forgotten, and the shame which he bore for the sake of Christ would then indeed appear his highest glory.

But why refer to mortal examples? Let us rather consider "Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself;" who was buffeted, and reviled, and persecuted for the sake of mankind, even of those who had despised and rejected him. When we behold the "Lord of life and glory" thus condescending to become "an outcast of the people," and bearing every pain and indignity that malice could inflict, how trifling does that portion of shame appear which his followers are called upon to sustain! It is less than nothing in comparison. What ingratitude, therefore, as well as impiety, is it to shrink from a little shame for his sake who has done so much for us!

Let us not then fear to profess before men that we are in earnest about the salvation of our souls; that we feel an ardent love and gratitude to the Redeemer; that we depend by faith upon his sacrifice and obedience for our salvation; and that we desire to live in the holy, self-denying spirit of his religion. They may indeed wonder at the change in our character, and designate our conduct by some contemptuous epithet; but if we enjoy the smile of our God and our conscience, all will be peace. The hope of the glory that awaits the Christian far outweighs, even in the present world, the contempt of men; and it will not be long before those who ridiculed his conduct will wish that they were partakers of his reward.

Let us not fear then to advocate the doctrines of the cross of our Saviour. Let our conversation and spirit prove that we are not ashamed of prayer, of praise, of studying the scriptures, of devotional intercourse, or of that divine operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, which constitutes so important a doctrine of Christianity. Let us explicitly act up to our sentiments. It is not unusual to find dying persons lamenting their former want of sincerity and firmness in this important particular. We know not what poignant regrets we are laying up for our departing hours,

if we recoil, while in health, from an unreserved and constant avowal of our religious principles. When we come within view of eternity, nothing will more grieve our minds or darken our prospects, than the consciousness of having, through fear of the reproach of Christ, concealed, perhaps even from our dearest intimates and friends, our views on the most important of all subjects which can interest a human being. Having acted disingenuously towards our Saviour in our days of health and usefulness, how can we expect that he will irradiate our expiring moments with his divine presence and manifestations? The written rule of God's conduct is, "them that honor me I will honor;" and why should we think that in our particular case he will reverse it? When eternity approaches, it usually appears so unspeakably important, and the opinions of men so completely lose their former influence upon the mind, that the repentant sufferer is astonished at the fatuity of his own conduct in not acting up to the plain, unsophisticated spirit of his heavenly profession. How often do we hear of persons, constitutionally the most timid, summoning around their death-bed their thoughtless relatives and dependants, to declare to them, for the first, and, perhaps, the last time, what they bitterly acknowledge *ought* to have been their own conduct, and what they affectionately trust will be the conduct of their surviving friends? Piety never yet excited a blush in a dying man:

"Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die."

Let us not then ask, as persons too commonly do, What will men say were we to begin to make a consistent profession of religion? Let us ask rather, What will conscience say if we neglect to do it? What will the holy angels say, when they see before the bar of Heaven an accountable and immortal being, who knew what his heavenly vocation required, but who feared the momentary contempt of man more than the eternal

wrath of God? What will condemned spirits say, when they find that their malicious arts have seduced us into an inextricable snare? Above all, What will be the language of the omniscient Judge, when in the dreadful day of account we appear before his impartial tribunal? How do the opinions of mortals vanish into nothing before these important considerations!

Let us then regard the world as it really is; or, what is much the same thing, as it will appear to us when we are about to quit it. Let us view it as false, as unsatisfying, as probationary; and let us habitually contrast it with that unchangeable and eternal world towards which we are so rapidly approaching. This will be a powerful argument against being ashamed of Christ; for what is the frown or the applause of a few misguided mortals to the man who expects in a few days, or years, to be a glorified spirit in the presence of his omnipotent Creator, enjoying the delights of heaven for evermore?

THE DUTY OF CHRISTIAN AFFECTION BETWEEN MINISTERS AND THEIR FLOCK.

Love to God and charity to our neighbor are the sum and substance of the decalogue. The latter part of the duty forms that "new commandment" which our divine Lord gave to his disciples, and which is an epitome of the second table of the other ten.

The universality of the duty of loving our neighbor does not, however, prevent its applying with peculiar force to the more intimate relations and connexions of life. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brethren and sisters, masters and servants, are placed by the gospel under particular obligations to the practice of this delightful command. There is also another connexion which is frequently and pointedly mentioned in the New Testament; namely, the sacred and responsible relation, between spiritual pastors and their flock.

Emancipation from ecclesiastical tyranny is reckoned, and justly, among the privileges of modern times. But in throwing off a burdensome and useless yoke, in restoring conscience to its just and unalienable rights, may not men, in the usual spirit of innovation, have done more than was necessary, more than was wise? The present age has not indeed materially abridged the immunities of the church; but has it not introduced, what, to a clergyman who really values the souls of his fellow-creatures, must appear far more injurious, a general diminution of affection and esteem for its

ministers? Has it not discarded most of those innocent prepossessions in their favour, which, with whatever disadvantages it might be attended, once formed also a plentiful source of usefulness? Compared with former days, how little do we now hear of persons applying to their religious teacher for advice in difficulties, for direction in scruples of conscience, for mediation in cases of contest and dispute?

The laity, in fact, tend to fill the church with indolent, unskilful, and irreligious ministers, by not making it a public disgrace not to be the very reverse of these characters. Were they unanimously to show, that they expect from their pastors, not simply the accustomed public services, but private advice and instruction, and an example of all the holy, humble, self-denying graces of the Christian and ministerial characters,—improper persons would be in a great measure excluded from the church, by finding that it was an arduous, and, to them, irksome employment, instead of the pleasant sinecure which they had been taught to expect. They could not withstand public opinion. The clerical function would be a torment to a mere man of the world, and he would seek refuge from it in some less spiritual vocation.

But so long as the laity are willing to tolerate irreligious ministers, they must not be surprised if such ministers abound. The general opinion of the world is indeed no excuse for a pastor who does not live up to his holy profession; but this opinion, if correctly exerted, would be a powerful drawback upon those who intended to assume the sacred garb only for the sake of interested considerations.

The great mutual duty between clergymen and their parishes is Christian affection; for where this exists, it will prompt its possessor to discharge every other obligation of his allotted calling.

On the part of a *minister*, the necessity of Christian affection is self-evident. His very office is a "labor

of love." He is a shepherd, a guide, a messenger of peace; and every thing that can demand affection and fidelity belongs to his responsible vocation. When he considers how the incarnate Son of the most high God,—"that great Shepherd of the sheep," laid down his life for his flock, how can he avoid feeling something, though comparatively but a small part, of his divine Master's love? Daily employed, as he must necessarily be if he live up to the duties of his profession, in teaching men to "put on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering," and to fulfil that new commandment of Christ, that, "as he loved us, so should we love one another," how can he but imbibe something of the blessed spirit which he inculcates upon others? How can he himself avoid learning what he thus teaches to all human kind?

One of the most striking features of the apostolic age is the Christian regard that subsisted between pastors and their flock. The language and wishes of St. Paul are inexpressibly affecting. To attempt to select individual examples of his tenderness for his Christian converts would be superfluous; for what page is there of his writings that does not abound in them? In like manner, the beloved apostle who leaned upon Jesus' breast, and seems there to have imbibed no small portion of that meek philanthropy which adorned the character of the Redeemer, was accustomed to exhibit by the most endearing epithets the Christian affection of his heart. Brethren,—my beloved,—my well beloved,—my little children,—are the usual titles by which the venerable Saint John was wont to address his interesting charge; whilst every thing that he uttered or recorded proved the amiable feeling of his own heart, and was well adapted for infusing a kindred principle into the hearts of others.

There is much in every class of character and every situation to excite the affection or pity of a Chris-

tian minister. For the younger part of his flock, he surely cannot but feel an inexpressible anxiety whilst he considers their ignorance and thoughtlessness, and how in the bloom of their days, and at the very time when they ought to yield themselves unreservedly to their Creator, they are gaily and smilingly running the road that leadeth to destruction. For the aged he sheds a more bitter, because more hopeless tear, while he views them, though upon the very brink of eternity, more insensible oftentimes of their danger than youth itself. Over early piety he watches with the affectionate solicitude of paternal regard. For the advanced Christian he feels the love and esteem due to a brother in Christ Jesus; while to the aged disciple, bending beneath the weight of accumulated years, and about to be gathered, like a shock of corn fully ripe, into the heavenly garner, he looks up with the veneration of a son beside the death-bed of an expiring parent.

How intense are his feelings when upon the Sabbath he beholds his flock collected to receive instruction from his lips! "*These immortal souls are given to my charge.*" He needs no other reflection to excite his affection. This one thought contains a volume. What tie so binding? What responsibility so awful? What claim to Christian love so strict and so endearing? Would you ascertain the ardor of his feelings? Trace, if possible, the fervent aspirations that silently ascend from his inmost soul to the throne of mercy, while he beholds one unhappy sinner ignorant and inattentive, another callous and impenetrable, a third evidently grovelling in the world, scarcely unharnessed from the overpowering cares of the week; and even of those who seem, for the moment, really interested and affected, the greater part obliterating the hallowed impression as soon as the solemn service is concluded.

So completely indeed ought Christian affection to be the characteristic of a pious minister, that he should

become the entire property of others. Forgetting himself, and his personal feelings, he should become "all things to all men;" he should "weep with them that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice;" "to the weak he must become as weak, to gain the weak;" he must seek, "not his own, but another man's" prosperity, and must comfort those that are in trouble, "by the comfort wherewith he is himself comforted of God."

Without however entering more deeply into this exhaustless part of the subject, it may be more generally useful to consider the propriety of a reciprocal affection in the flock towards their spiritual pastor.

If a minister really exhibit an affectionate spirit, *gratitude* demands a similar return.

St. Paul very forcibly urges this consideration in his apostolical advice to the Thessalonians:—"We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." A minister is, or ought to be, like his adorable Master, a spiritual physician; and surely if we feel grateful to those who are anxious to restore to health the diseased body, we should not forget those who evince an equal anxiety to perform a still more kind office for the immortal soul; especially when we consider, that in so doing they are often obliged to sacrifice their own personal feelings, and to bear opposition and ill-will for the unsparing faithfulness of their exertions.

Could we once fairly enter into the feelings of a conscientious minister, we could not surely withhold our gratitude, even though we might not duly perceive the necessity of his solicitude upon our account. We see, and perhaps applaud him, in his more open ministrations; but forget that his private moments, his silent meditations, his literary hours, his sleepless nights, his unseen retirements, are not less spent for our

benefit than the stated periods of public devotion. When we see him not, he is thinking upon us, and is perhaps pouring forth intercessions to his heavenly Father upon our account.

But, in addition to the ties of gratitude, we should be prompted to this Christian duty by *our own interest and welfare*. If we value the gospel, we must endeavor to feel esteem and regard for those who dispense it; otherwise the most interesting truths will be coldly received, on account of our indifference to the person by whom they are proclaimed. How often have individuals, for the sake perhaps of a trifling dispute, (in which, after all, they were possibly conscious that their minister's conduct had been perfectly correct,) imbibed such prejudices as to refuse to hear the message of peace from his lips, and have thus irreparably injured their own immortal souls, for the sake of gratifying an unchristian temper!

If the conduct of our teacher be such that he fails to deserve our esteem and regard, the guilt is his and not ours; but thoughtless or voluntary prejudice, (and it is to such only that the present remarks apply,) is a sin against ourselves. The recoil in this case is always greater than the direct stroke. It is poor revenge to destroy our own souls for the pleasure of breaking another man's repose. Where a spirit of unkindness exists, we may attend the most practical and useful ministration for years together, without deriving any spiritual improvement. When the heart is firmly intrenched in obstinate prejudices, life often wears away before the religious instructer can sap even the outworks of the citadel. The Holy Spirit, it is true, can melt the most obdurate heart into contrition, and exemplify the efficacy of the gospel where it was most despised: but this is not the ordinary mode of his operation; for we usually find, that where his celestial influences are systematically opposed by deliberate prejudice, he at length withdraws them altogether, and

leaves the proud offender to voluntary "hardness of heart and contempt of his word and commandment."

But how pleasing is the reverse of this painful scene! How delightful the message of peace from the lips of one whom we regard in the bonds of Christian affection! A beloved pastor attracts us to our duty, and we receive delight and improvement from his labors. Even his reproofs, (to use the allusion of the Psalmist) are "like excellent oil that shall not break the head;"—how much more then his encouragement and advice!

It is not, however, our *own* interest only that is affected by our attachment or hostility towards our spiritual pastor. We cannot estimate the future consequences of rancor or even coolness towards one who is really the servant of God. Our example may influence our friends and dependants, so that many, who, like the Ninevites, might have been brought to repent of their sins, and have received the pardon of them through faith in their Redeemer, may have eternal cause to reproach us as the instruments of their destruction. Nothing, on the other hand, more promotes true religion than Christian amity between ministers and their flock. Even the persecutors of the primitive church could not but feel admiration while they exclaimed, "Behold how these Christians love one another." But where enmity, or even indifference, exists, our spiritual enemy takes advantage of them to obstruct the cause of religion, and to lay an insuperable impediment for the weak and uninformed. Where therefore we find a minister faithful to his heavenly-delegated trust, great mutual advantage will result from our confidence and regard; for few things will more constrain him to constant zeal, watchfulness, prayer, self-denial, humility, and general consistency of conduct, than finding that he is the spiritual adviser of those, who, like himself, are really in earnest respecting their salvation.

Should it be asked, what is the proper line of conduct where a minister is evidently not a man of piety, or personally deserving of religious esteem, it would be difficult to give a precise reply. The circumstances of the case will, however, almost always direct a conscientious mind; and a prudent and religious friend is usually the best casuist. General casuistry, however occasionally useful to persons really sincere, is much oftener consulted to discover plausible evasions of duty, than really to enlighten a scrupulous conscience. It is a grievous task, as in the supposed instance, to provide rules for what ought not to exist. There are, besides, a thousand minute shades of character from him who is not decidedly religious, to him who is decidedly profligate and abandoned; so that no one rule can possibly apply to every individual case. We may respect and regard, and even derive partial profit from many an individual, in whom, however, we cannot confide respecting all the essentials of salvation.

But what, it may be asked, are the *effects* of this divine grace of Christian affection, where it exists in its due power and extent?

On the part of *ministers*, it will produce Christian diligence and faithfulness. To "reprove, rebuke, exhort," so far from being inconsistent with true affection, are its surest marks; provided they be performed, as the apostle directs, "with all long-suffering and doctrine." On the contrary, to speak "peace, peace, where there is no peace," is a refinement in cruelty, at which Christian tenderness would shudder. The clerical function was not appointed to delude men, and to make them happy with the hopes of heaven while they persist in the way that leads to destruction. It is the part of ministerial charity to show even professed Christians, even the moral and sincere, that they are inheritors of a corrupt nature; that they are "very far gone from original righteousness;" that, born with innate propensities to evil, they have wilfully and contin-

ually indulged those propensities in their actual practice; that they have sinned against light and against knowledge; against the silent remonstrances of God's Spirit in their consciences, and the open prohibitions and mandates of his word. A minister who really desires the spiritual welfare of his hearers, will go on to state the awful consequences of sin. He will delineate it in its terrific proportions, not only as a moral and political evil, but as directly hostile to the divine nature and the divine law, and as meriting the utmost indignation of our offended Creator. Far from extenuating its guilt, or reducing it to an almost pardonable human frailty, he will exhibit the denunications of scripture against it, and shew the awfulness of the eternal punishment to which it has rendered us exposed. To point out unseen and unsuspected danger is an indispensable duty of genuine affection. A faithful minister will therefore warn his hearers with fervor and a heart-felt interest for their eternal safety; invariably accompanying his exhortations with earnest prayer to that divine Enlightener of the human understanding, who alone can render them effectual.

Should his efforts be blessed;—should an inquirer, fully perceiving his offences, and "worthily lamenting them," be brought to examine into the spiritual method of salvation, the anxious pastor's "labor of love" is yet but begun. Before he dares attempt to heal the wound, he must examine whether it has been sufficiently deep; he must ascertain that the repentance has not been superficial, or partial, or insincere; that not merely the dread of future punishment, but a real hatred to sin, and a holy fear of offending God, actuate the returning penitent. This essential point being ascertained, ministerial affection assumes its more pleasing office of guarding against false refuges, and exhibiting the true. It points out the impossibility of being saved, either wholly or in part, by a covenant of works which we have repeatedly and wilfully broken.

It warns the inquirer against the equally unscriptural hope of being under a mitigated law, and shows that salvation is unattainable in any of the methods suggested by mere natural religion. Were heaven capable of being purchased by one good thought, even this price would be far beyond the unassisted power of man to bestow.

Every delusive expectation being excluded, it becomes the delightful task of a Christian instructer unreservedly to point out Him "who taketh away the sin of the world;" and to exhibit the sufficiency, the freeness, the suitability of the redemption provided in the gospel. Nothing can be more congenial to Christian affection, than to expatiate upon the infinite and gratuitous mercy of Him who is emphatically denominated *Love;* and to reply to the penitent inquirer, in the words of Saint Paul to the jailer at Philippi, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The "inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world" is the most prominent topic of a Christian pastor's instructions. Every thing else is subordinate, and *comparatively* uninteresting. The endeavor even to convince men of sin is but preparatory to this; for the knowledge of our spiritual disease would be of no value, if it did not lead us to resort to the heavenly Physician.

The Christian minister, therefore, affectionately proceeds to show the necessity of being united to the Redeemer by such a true and lively faith as accepts him in all the relations which he is mercifully pleased to bear to mankind. In virtue of this union by faith we are said in scripture to be justified; and being thus justified, to enjoy "peace with God."

But the Christian affection of a pious minister towards his flock does not end even here. It is not enough that he has proclaimed the terrors of the divine law, and faithfully exhibited the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" he must earnestly and continually

exhort those who *have* believed, that "they be zealous to maintain good works," that "they adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things," that they "go on to perfection," that they exemplify in their hearts, their conduct, and their life, the holiness, the zeal, the humility, the affection, the vigilance, of the Christian character. He must continually and earnestly inculcate the amiableness and the necessity of every moral and social virtue; not indeed as detached and self-dependent, but as connected with Christian motives and Christian ends. He must exhort his hearers to abound in "whatsoever is lovely and of good report." In a word, he must never be really satisfied till by the blessing of God he sees every individual committed to his charge "renewed in the spirit of his mind," living up to his baptismal engagements, and loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself. It needs not be added, that here is an object for the most ardent affection, a labor for the longest life. Alexander might sit down and weep because he had no new world to conquer; but he whose object is the subjugation of vice and misery, of prejudice and irreligion, will find that, after all his efforts, his task has but commenced.

> Non Hydra, secto corpore, firmior
> Vinci dolentem crevit in Herculem.

But why attempt to describe, in a few brief hints, the sublime effects of a truly apostolic minister's affection for his flock? Behold him persisting in his course during his whole life, in the midst perhaps of insensibility, opposition, and unkindness; overcoming, by patience and consistency of conduct, the impediments thrown in his way by envy or misrepresentation; hourly practising humility and self-denial; devoting his time, his talents, his property, for the good of others; anxious to fulfil every public and private duty; instructing the poor and ignorant; reproving

the profane; watching over the wavering; comforting the afflicted; preparing the sick and the dying for another world; teaching the rich and prosperous how they ought to live in this; sacrificing his own will and interest for the sake of others; resigning the ornaments of taste and learning for "plainness of speech" and general utility; and, like his divine Master, exerting himself earnestly and unremittingly, during his whole life, in doing all possible good to the bodies and souls of men, especially of those immediately committed to his charge. This is surely an interesting spectacle; and it may be justly inquired what duties Christian affection demands from his flock in return?

The first is *teachableness;* apparently the most easy, yet the most difficult lesson which man can learn. To divest ourselves of prejudice and partiality, of critical fastidiousness and learned pride, and to sit down, like the multitude of old, waiting for the ministers of Christ to distribute to others that bread of life which their Master had dispensed to them, is our privilege as well as our duty.

Far, however, from this, we too often listen to a sermon as to a mere literary composition submitted for our opinion, rather than as to a piece of instruction and advice intended for our improvement. We perhaps feel greater pleasure in refuting arguments than in weighing them; in showing how easily we could improve upon the doctrine or the style, than in striving to exemplify the duties which are inculcated.

A sermon is not, however, necessarily useless because it happens to be thought dull, or because it teaches what we knew before. That we have souls, we are well aware—that we must die, is certain—that eternity will succeed, and man be judged, and heaven or hell be our portion forever, are acknowledged articles of our belief;—but do we never need to be reminded of the practical importance of these forgotten truths? do we never require them to be explicitly set

before us as motives to duty, as warnings to repentance, as incentives to faith? Are we as humble, as vigilant, as prayerful, as benevolent, as holy, as we ought to be? May not a very common-place discourse chance to remind us of something we had omitted, or stimulate us to something we ought to perform?

Even where a minister dwells simply upon an outward duty, without inculcating, as he ought, the scriptural motives of action, a pious and intelligent hearer, if such happen to be present, may usually extract some portion of spiritual benefit. He may convert heathen morality into Christian, by adding in his own mind what the preacher had omitted, and rectifying what he had misplaced. The sermon, for example, had perhaps inculcated the duty of alms-giving, but in a way more resembling the dictates of the schools of ancient ethics, or modern sentimentalism, than those of the humble and spiritual college of Galilee. Now this, though far, very far, from being what a true disciple of Christ wishes to hear, or a minister of Christ ought to preach, may yet be converted into gold by the transmuting power of a wise and teachable spirit. We have only to remember, that the duty prescribed is to be a *fruit* of our faith and love towards God, and not a bribe to purchase heaven;—that, in order to be acceptable, it must spring, not from human motives, but from the divine operation of Him from whom "all good works do proceed;"—that it must not minister to pride, or ambition, or self-love;—that it must remind us more of how little we perform than how much; and lead us to the free salvation offered in the gospel, and not to any dependence upon our own supposed merits. It is only necessary to intersperse tacit reflections of this kind, in order to derive spiritual utility from many a discourse, which had no immediate or striking tendency to produce such an effect. We should hear a sermon of this kind as we read the Offices of Cicero, (many of whose duties, by the way, are far more scru-

pulous than the generality of Christians think necessary to be transcribed into their own practice,) with the constant reflection, that if natural religion requires so much, *how much more* is required by revealed? If a merely nominal and superficial Christian inculcate such high and arduous duties, how surpassingly virtuous and holy should be the conduct of him who possesses truly evangelical motives to obedience?

But if a judicious and docile spirit can thus derive benefit even from discourses constructed upon such inferior principles, how much more from others, which although far from exhibiting any great novelty, or depth, or elegance, are yet consistent with the analogy of faith, and honestly and diligently intended to advance the spiritual interests of mankind? Here Christian affection ought completely to overcome a captious and fastidious spirit. We are not to be "respecters of persons:" we are not to indulge our taste at the expense of our religious improvement. Our attachment to our pastors must be proportioned to their piety, and not to their talent. We should consider, not the man, but the message which he bears. Thus teachably disposed, we may confidently expect the divine blessing upon a discourse of but very humble literary merit, and delivered perhaps in a manner very far from pleasing to the natural feelings; while, on the contrary, the pious fervor of Saint Paul, embodied in the eloquence of an Apollos, would probably be useless to the man who came to hear with voluntary prejudice and want of Christian regard.

There is another duty frequently mentioned by the apostolic writers, and one which this holy affection should always prompt us gladly to perform, in proportion as a minister is found faithful to his trust—namely, a just deference to the authority with which he is invested by the great "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." In purer ages of the church, the mild reproof of a faithful pastor was usually sufficient to awe the

most licentious of his flock. Men who could meet every other eye with inflexible audacity, blushed for their sins in the venerable presence of their spiritual guide. Ecclesiastical discipline almost superseded the necessity for judicial punishment. Nothing of importance was begun or concluded without the prayers and admonitions of the church.

It is to be lamented that this state of things too often induced ecclesiastics to "lord it over God's heritage," and to assume "dominion over men's faith," instead of becoming "helpers of their joy;" and therefore imperatively demanded both censure and amendment. But, in avoiding this evil, have we not reverted to the opposite extreme? Our forefathers made the power of ministers so great as to be susceptible of abuse; we therefore, in the too frequent spirit of modern improvement, have reduced it almost to nothing. A minister, except in his church, has become a private individual. We should perhaps esteem it little less than an insult for our parochial teacher, in virtue of his office, to enter into our presence, with the view of remonstrating with us on any impropriety in our conduct, and of bestowing on us his religious advice and admonition. We yield, perhaps, some latitude to a clergyman in the rustic circle of an obscure hamlet: we allow him to usurp some little power over laborers, and peasants, and mechanics: we do not deny that he may put his hand to the latch of an alms-house, or a cottage; because we perceive that his visits, thus confined, may conduce to the general benefit of the community, and that while he converses, unsolicited, amongst these humbler ranks, he does no more than the immemorial customs of the country, and the stated subordinations of life would allow, without any appeal to spiritual authority; —but let his reproofs or instructions come home to his equals or superiors in life, and we instantly prove, by our conduct, that what in former days was acceptable

even to nobles and to kings, is utterly opposed to the spirit of modern times.

But Christian affection ought to receive the efforts of a faithful pastor in a very different manner: it will not conclude that he is a proud and supercilious intruder, because he merely had the boldness to say, "My friend, I am grieved at your deportment: permit me to remind you of the duty you owe to society and to your God." We willingly hear the advice of a skilful and honest neighbor in our temporal affairs: why then should we refuse to listen to the messenger of truth, whose object of concern is the welfare of our souls, and who can have no other end in view, except the discharging of his own conscience, and the honor of his God?

The apostolic injunction is very strong; and unless the spiritual relation between ministers and their people can be proved to have been since altered by divine command, is still applicable in its full energy and import:—"Obey them that have the rule over you: submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief."

Another evident effect of Christian love to our pastors will be co-operation with them. The natural difficulties of the sacred function are surely enough, without the additional impediment of finding every scheme of utility thwarted by coldness or opposition. We should therefore endeavor to preserve "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." It is an amiable sight to behold a church at harmony with itself; each member united in Christian affection towards his neighbor and his spiritual guide, and studying nothing but what may conduce to the glory of God, and the temporal and eternal welfare of human kind. A band of brothers is not easily broken; and we may always be assured, that where God is pleased to infuse

into ministers and their people a mutual spirit of co-operation in his cause, He designs to produce much good by their combined instrumentality.*

* As a proof of this co-operation, it was the custom in former ages for the more affluent and charitable members of a parish to make their minister the almoner of at least a part of their benevolence. To the individual, the secrecy of this method of doing good must have been a pleasing proof that he "did not his alms to be seen of men;" and a principal reason perhaps why it has fallen into comparative disuse, is the ostentatious desire of men to see their name and deed blazoned in the honorary lists of charitable subscription. It is easier to give a tithe of our income to swell a printed report, than silently to glide a thousandth part of it into the hands of the poor and afflicted, through the confidential medium of a friend. Where, however, we are perfectly satisfied of an almoner's faithfulness and prudence, many advantages will attend the revival of this primitive custom—a custom which happily is not wholly lost, though it is very much neglected.

In the first place, we cannot but conceive that one who is daily called to explore the haunts of wretchedness, with a view to administer either temporal or spiritual aid, must be a better judge of the immediate wants and claims of the surrounding poor, than the man of business or affluence, whose time and attention are devoted to very different pursuits.

Again—a minister's access to the indigent sick and afflicted, and consequently his opportunities of usefulness among them, often depend, in no small measure, upon his opportunities of relieving their temporal afflictions. The religious visit is seldom duly appreciated, unless it close with an act of pecuniary charity; for the lower classes of mankind have oftentimes little conception of disinterestedness; and can be brought to believe its existence only when it presses upon them in the shape of temporal relief. A sacrifice of time, or a violence done to the feelings, have seldom much effect upon their mind. Prayers and good wishes, and zeal for their eternal welfare, they think cost nothing; but almsgiving opens the avenues of their hearts, and prepares a way for all the rest. They cannot doubt that those are in earnest of whose bounty they have received so sensible a demonstration. But alas! in what way are clergymen, especially in large and indigent parishes, to indulge the liberal feelings of Christian philanthropy, out of the trifling pittance which so frequently falls to their lot? Too often are they obliged to leave the couch of poverty and anguish, with a mind harrowed up by the reflection of how much benefit *might* be conferred, how much misery *might* be prevented, by an abridgment, which would scarcely be felt, of a few luxuries upon the part of their more opulent parishioners. They return to a home of frugality and self-denial, conscious that what they have bestowed, though more, perhaps, than they ought to spare, is yet less than can be of any real utility; and knowing, that with every disposition to be bountiful, the very object whom they desire to relieve will measure

Another effect of this Christian love to ministers will be prayer for them. We are required to intercede for all men, but in an especial manner for those who watch over us in the faith. If he who was not "a whit behind" the chief of the apostles thought it necessary, upon various occasions, to say to the Hebrews, the Ephesians, the Thessalonians, "Pray for us," it is surely no disparagement to modern pastors to suppose that they stand in need of the same assistance, and no enthusiasm to expect that the sincere prayers of their flock will be effectual to the same end. In the public services of the church, we earnestly remember our ministers at the throne of mercy, and there are few manuals of prayer for individuals, or for families, in which they are forgotten; so that we have no possible excuse for the neglect of this easy and interesting obligation.

Were we duly to appreciate the difficulties and the responsibility of the sacred function, we could not fail to supplicate the especial blessing of God for all on whom it has devolved; and amongst these, our own pastors ought, evidently, to claim a distinct enumeration. Our benevolent wishes will also rebound upon ourselves; for we are never so likely to derive profit, as from one for whom we have supplicated the throne of mercy.

Such then are some of the effects of Christian affec-

their charity rather by what they do not, than by what they do; and will impute to avarice or want of feeling what resulted from uncontrollable necessity.

How easily might these effects be prevented, and the visits of ministers be rendered doubly agreeable to themselves, and doubly useful both to the bodies and souls of the afflicted poor, by a very trifling sum given into their hands for this purpose by those who are able, and are therefore in duty bound, to assist in relieving their burdened neighbors. The sums, though very considerable, which the laws of the country require, by no means discharge us from voluntary alms, if our means are adequate to the demand. We give nothing from genuine philanthropy if we give only what we cannot withhold.

tion. By the reciprocal discharge of these interesting duties, the ministerial relation will be rendered mutually useful and happy, till that eventful moment arrives, in which the distinction between pastors and their flock will be forever forgotten, by all becoming "one fold under one Shepherd."

COMPARATIVE VIEW OF NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION.

In looking around among the majority of professed believers in revelation, a serious observer is sometimes induced mentally to ask,—"In what manner do these persons differ from mere deists?" Their character, perhaps, is not immoral: but this single mark is too equivocal to stamp their designation; for natural religion enjoins morality, while health, and comfort, and the hopes of respect in society, all combine to render it eligible.

As yet, therefore, there is nothing exclusively Christian in their deportment.—"But they occasionally, or even habitually, attend Christian worship." A prudent or time-serving deist may do this, from a regard to decorum, or popular sentiment, or the well-being of society, which he acknowledges could not exist without some show of religion; and Christianity being, he thinks, not worse, and probably better, than others, he adopts it, with all its supposed evils, for the sake of its exterior good effects.

But perhaps the persons in question really believe the articles of the Christian faith:—so far is well; yet if their creed be merely an unmeaning recognition, they are still not necessarily unsuitable companions for the deist, who will scarcely wrangle with them for a latent article of belief, so long as they contrive that it shall have no visible effect upon their conduct or their heart.

What then is their real religious system? Why evidently they have none. Religion has never seriously entered into their calculations. So far, however, as their ideas have attained a definite shape, we may perceive a few principles of what is called natural religion, mingled with certain crude, ill-understood notions from revelation, but without any harmony or proportion in the general design.

The persons under consideration, while they do not deny the truths of Christianity, seem to think it somewhat too strict in its requisitions. Though they do not perform, as they admit, all that scripture, strictly construed, may seem to require, they comfort themselves with supposing that they observe with tolerable propriety all that the light of nature suggests, and all therefore that God in reality demands. Their domestic and social relations, we are told, are respectably filled: they are useful and honorable members of the community; so that, upon a general review of their character, they fondly conclude, that whoever may be finally excluded from the joys of heaven, they at least shall not be among the unhappy number.

In reasoning upon the subject of religion, especially with those who acknowledge the truth of revelation, it is not always safe to quit scriptural ground, and to recur to the principles of merely natural theology. If, however, the practice be on any occasion allowable, it is surely so in making the endeavor to convince the professed Christian of the unsuitability of his conduct to the dictates of revealed religion, by showing how completely he falls short even of the imperfect standard of deistical philosophy. For this purpose, it will be endeavored, in the succeeding pages of this essay, to point out a few prominent characteristics of what is called natural religion, with the corresponding duties and obligations of its professor. Deists themselves, though in their own conduct often the most profligate of men, have yet sometimes inculcated in their writings,

(perhaps for the purpose of spreading their pernicious tenets with more effect,) a morality and seriousness far beyond what many professed Christians think it necessary to attain.

Lest, however, the following views of natural duties should seem to convey an impression that the sincere though imperfect fulfilment of them, (if they had been thus fulfilled,) would have been sufficient for human salvation, and thus supersede or diminish the necessity for the system of mercy offered in the gospel, it will be desirable to add several characteristics also of Christian theology, and to allude to some of those important points which are made known exclusively by divine revelation. It must, however, be premised, that a general comparison of natural and revealed religion is by no means intended, and much less a complete delineation of either. A few detached points of observation are all that will be marked out, without even regularly entering into the proofs upon which the admitted principles depend.

To ascertain precisely how much is implied in the term *natural religion* is impossible, since no two deists themselves exactly cohere in their plan of speculation. Were it not that hatred to Christianity forms an indissoluble bond of union between them, we might often doubt whether they were disciples of the same school. It is not true that deism is free from its sects and factions. It partakes of them as much as is possible in a system of mere negatives. The deistical writers disagree, among other important subjects, upon the materiality or immateriality of the human soul;—upon the question respecting innate ideas, which is evidently a momentous point for consideration in their system;—upon the nature of the rewards of virtue and the punishment of vice, and whether these may or may not extend beyond the present state;—and especially do they differ upon the method of ascertaining and enforcing moral duty; some asserting that it arises from

an innate sense; others from reason pointing out the eternal fitness of things; and others from the mere local knowledge of social and political regulations.

The difficulty of ascertaining how much or how little is included in what is termed the religion of nature, is greatly increased by the general system of borrowing without acknowledgment from the precepts, and even the doctrines, of revelation. By the free, though unacknowledged, use of this assistance, certain deistical writers have contrived to adorn their pages with something that much resembles a tolerable system of external duties. It is true, that the whole spirit and vitality of the duty is in such cases entirely lost from the absence of those Christian motives by which alone it could be produced; yet the duty itself continues to remain on the deistical page,—not indeed as what was ever intended seriously to be enforced,—but as what was necessary to allure those more sober free-thinkers who still professed to admire the morality of the gospel. The delicate exotic evidently faded in its new soil, yet its withered trunk and lineaments were exhibited as proofs of its having been indigenous to the unkindly spot.

To learn, therefore, the true extent of natural religion, it might seem expedient to refer to those writers who flourished antecedently to the Christian era; or to those modern pagans to whom Christianity is entirely unknown: yet even here we might be deceived, since whatever of God is acknowledged among the heathens themselves, may, for what deists know to the contrary, be only traditional vestiges of an early revelation, or may have been indirectly introduced by means of Judaism, or even in later times of Christianity itself.

Strictly speaking, therefore, the very term *natural religion*, if meant to imply a religious code impressed generally upon the human mind, even irrespectively of serious reflection on the subject, is liable to much exception. The very idea of a superior Being, though

almost universally diffused, is more probably the result of reasoning and argument, if not of remote tradition, than of an innate persuasion necessarily coeval with the first dawnings of the human understanding. To vindicate the goodness and justice of God, which may seem to our feeble reason to require that he should not leave himself without witness in the conscience of any intelligent being, it is by no means necessary to suppose the idea of his existence to be a native impression. If such an idea really exists, it matters not, in the present argument, in what manner it was derived.

On the present occasion, therefore, disquisitions of this kind are by no means required; for if a duty has been explicitly admitted by deists themselves, (whatever might be their motive for its admission,) it will equally answer the present purpose,—namely, that of appealing to the consciences of professed Christians,—whether the duty were really suggested by natural reason, or whether, being first disclosed by divine revelation, it appeared so rational, that even those who rejected revelation in general could not refuse to admit that individual precept.

Natural religion, as professed by deists, is founded, in common with revealed, upon a belief of the existence of God. From this primary doctrine spring all our moral obligations; so that nothing can be more important than to keep it ever present to our view.—We cannot, indeed, easily find persons who formally and avowedly deny it; but a considerable degree of practical forgetfulness on the subject is almost universal. For this forgetfulness, the best remedy is indeed the constant perusal of the sacred volume. *There* we uniformly perceive traces of the Divinity: there his nature, his perfections, his offices are plainly unfolded. We are explicitly taught in what manner he made, and in what manner he governs the world. Scarcely any event is recorded without evident marks of his interposition. The whole volume of revelation, therefore,

is admirably and specifically calculated to remedy that lamentable defect in human nature, by which we are so often inclined to forget what we nevertheless acknowledge, in our deliberate judgment, to be true. He who in theory believes that a God exists, will in scripture find himself constantly reminded of this important fact, and will derive, almost unconsciously, various useful and practical inferences for the regulation of his conduct and his heart, without which his speculative assent would be of no avail.

But, even independently of revelation, merely natural considerations, we might suppose, would keep alive in us this primary article of all religious belief. For are not vestiges of a divine hand stamped upon every object, animate and inanimate, in nature? Is not our own frame, in particular, a frame most "fearfully and wonderfully made," a perpetual evidence to us of the existence of our Creator? Or, if we look from our bodies to our minds, do not we perceive still further proofs of the same indisputable fact?

The first deduction of reason is, that *something* must have existed from all eternity. We cannot *conceive* of things having been produced absolutely without cause.

Now, whatever exists must have existed either by the necessity of its own nature, or by the agency of some other being. If by the agency of some other being, we may in imagination trace it to its cause, and to that cause go on to apply the same reasoning, till we ultimately arrive at something which we acknowledge must have existed absolutely, and by its own nature from all eternity. This argument fairly considered is irresistible; and the only possible way of seeming to elude its force, is by a sort of half-formed idea that this ultimate cause might have begun to exist *in time*, and not have been from all eternity. But if it began to exist in time, there must have been some cause of its beginning, some reason why it was produ-

ced; which was contrary to the supposition which had supposed that we had gone back as far as possible to the ultimate cause of all.

Imagine that we could retrace the origin of all the oak trees now existing upon the earth to a few thousands; thence to as many hundreds; thence to fifty; thence to ten; and so on, till we came to a single tree, which was the parent of all the rest. It is still as difficult to account for the existence of that single tree as for a million of full-grown oaks. That tree was either eternally existent, or it was produced by some other cause; for, as nothing can possibly give itself being, the first cause, *whatever it be*, must necessarily be eternal.

Having thus inferred that *something* must have been eternal, we are yet still far from having necessarily inferred that this something must have been what we denominate God. We may, however, arrive at this inference by the help of two or three further ideas.

The first cause, whatever it be, must have existed, it appears, from all eternity. How then was it derived? Assuredly not from nothing, without cause, for that is obviously absurd; neither from any external cause, it being by the supposition antecedent to every other cause. It must therefore have been *self-existent.*

Now, what is included in the idea of self-existence? Not surely self-derivation, for that is evidently an absurdity. Nothing can create itself. Self-existence must therefore imply and include *necessary* existence; an existence absolutely essential, and which cannot be denied without an absurdity. The universe cannot be this self-existent being, for we may without absurdity conceive it annihilated; but still there would remain something self-existent and eternal, from which every thing else had its origin.

From such preliminaries moral philosophers have proceeded to establish, even *à priori*, the essential attributes of the Great First Cause. They have demon-

strated that *matter* is not God; but that there must have been an *Intelligence*, eternal, self-existing, omnipotent, omnipresent, all-wise, and endowed with infinite goodness, justice, truth, and every other moral perfection. Now, although many, perhaps most, of the particulars in this enumeration must have been previously derived from revelation, yet even deists have admitted their propriety: nay, further,—because these things, *being once known*, were evidently congruous to reason, and in some measure capable of proof, they have even pretended that the knowledge of them was perfectly natural, and needed not to be revealed. Surely, then, if deists can thus argue, there can be no excuse for professed Christians who neglect the important considerations which result from a belief in the being of a God.

But for the purpose of continually recalling to mind what we all readily acknowledge to be true, these metaphysical proofs, allowing them to be correct, are by no means so apt as others of a very different description. They may serve indeed occasionally to confute the "vain philosophy" of the professed atheist, but by no means bring the subject home to the feelings and the heart. Indeed nothing, as was before observed, can *completely* do this except the constant perusal of the sacred volume. There are, however, numerous other proofs of the Divinity, sufficiently pressing and at hand, to put to shame the thoughtlessness of many nominal professors of Christianity, to whom alone these remarks are intended to apply.

That argument for the being and attributes of God which is derived from the universal consent of nations, though exceedingly strong, is not exactly to the point in hand; for those who formally acknowledge their Creator, yet habitually forget him, will not be likely to be adequately reminded of his presence by an idea, however forcible, that may not perhaps recur to their minds twenty times in the course of a long life. We need practical and pressing arguments; and the chief

of these, of an external nature, are the created objects with which we are surrounded, and which were expressly intended to be continual monitors to remind us of our adorable Creator.

Would men habitually and devoutly peruse the Bible, humbly imploring the guidance of its divine Author, they would not require any secondary helps to keep before their minds the idea of his existence; but since a large number, even of professed Christians, act habitually as though the existence of their Creator were a fable, nothing, however subordinate, can be wholly unimportant, which seems calculated to lead them to call to mind his presence;—not indeed that they may deistically rest there, but that being continually impressed with the idea of his presence, they may may have constant recourse to that hallowed volume which reveals his will.

Saint Paul, in addressing the atheists, deists, and polytheists of his time, was accustomed to refer them to the natural world, asserting that "*the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*" The devout Psalmist also considered it the summit of folly not to regard the Creator in the operations of his hands:—"*O Lord, how great are thy works, and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.*"

In truth, the surrounding evidences of the Deity are infinite. Every part, for example, of the human frame has been frequently proved to be a master-piece of divine skill and power. It is impossible, we might suppose, to behold an organic display of this complicated system without the idea of a God pressing upon

the mind ; and that not merely as a simple speculation, but with something of those awfully sublime feelings of human dependence and responsibility with which such a spectacle ought ever to be accompanied.

We always *believe* that there is a God, but upon particular occasions we seem to *feel* that there is one. The Deity is brought nigh to us in the wisdom, the power, or the mysteriousness of his works. There is an awful and undefineable correspondence between the outward object and the internal sensation. To a spectator, for example, not accustomed to a survey of the ocean, the first sight of it, if he be in a situation freely to commune with himself, can scarcely fail to bring to his mind so vividly the idea of a God, as to make him, for the moment, shudder at the thought of offending so great a Being. In this individual case, the effect seems to be produced, not so much by the mere grandeur of the scene, as by the idea conveyed of perpetual restlessness and motion, than which nothing more powerfully impresses the human mind, or more forcibly leads it to the consideration of a corresponding agent. It is the *motion* of the world, the planets, and other heavenly bodies, that so forcibly suggests to a devout astronomer the idea of Divinity. Even should an atheist induce himself to believe that the mere *matter* of these vast bodies may have existed from eternity, he can never hope plausibly to account for their *motion*, especially when he considers its regularity and beneficial effects, without acknowledging a God.

If from the inanimate world we turn to contemplate *ourselves*, the idea of a Creator presses strongly on the mind. We are mysterious beings. We know not whence we came, and, if ignorant of revelation, are equally uncertain whither we tend. We know only that we exist, and that we are constantly surrounded with an unseen but uncontrollable energy. We cannot command events : the sun will shine, the

wind blow, the grass wave, and the ocean be ruffled, independently of us: we could not prevent these and innumerable other events, were our existence to be suspended on the result. We are sometimes healthy or prosperous, without knowing wherefore; at other times in poverty, or sickness, or distress, against all the efforts of our strongest volitions. We cannot prearrange the order of events in general, or even of our own lives. We were born and we shall die without our own voluntary concurrence. We are continually stretching forward after something new: never satisfied with the present, we are incessantly anticipating the future, which, however, we awfully feel will roll on under the guidance of laws of which we are wholly ignorant. Yet, amidst all, we seem to have a sensation as if happiness, pure and complete happiness, were *somewhere* to be found. We feel as if these first imperfect rudiments of existence cannot be all that is attainable: there is a void in the bosom which we are persuaded *might* be filled, though we know not how.

Observe a husbandman daily employed during a long life in ploughing the same field, or reaping its produce, or partaking of its fruits, with scarcely any visible purpose for which he has existed, except perhaps to leave a successor to tread the same uniform round. Surely this cannot be all. There is evidently something so incomplete and unsatisfactory in the whole scheme of human life, when considered without the light of revelation, that it is impossible to know in what manner to regard it, except as a means towards some end with which by nature we are unacquainted. It is evidently not a finished plan, and yet still more evidently it is not a mere *lusus* of sportive chance. It is imperfect, yet there are clear evidences of design. We learn from history, that in all past ages men were substantially the same as at present; which, by the common laws of calculation, could not have been the

case had every thing been fortuitous. Is there not some end to all these day-dreams which surround us?

We are conscious that we are in the hands of another. We have no power to make a hair white or black. We could not make the least approach towards superadding a new limb or feature to our frame, were we seriously to exert ourselves for that purpose during the longest life. Now if the doctrine of appetency were true, this could scarcely be the case; for surely appetency would not refuse to exert itself at the call of so powerful and constant a volition. We are therefore either under the power of God, or of uncontrollable necessity and fate. The latter is utterly incredible; and indeed the utmost which we can conceive of what is called *fate*, is the irresistible will and power of an omnipotent Being. The law of fate (supposing the doctrine true) could no more exist without a cause than the law of gravitation. Antecedently to the admission of the existence of the Creator, it is perhaps impossible to conceive of any thing being necessary.—To imagine that something exists in nature which is the fateful cause of all effects, is only to make nature intelligent, and to endue her with the qualities that constitute our idea of Divinity.

But, *à posteriori*, the argument against either chance or necessity is still more convincing. No person can rationally believe that he is under the government of so uncertain a principle as the one, or so inflexible a principle as the other. There is far too much order in the world to be the result of chance, and too much variety to be the result of fate. Atheists themselves have been long ashamed of the doctrine of chance. *Fortune* has lost her unmerited honors, at least in books of grave philosophy, though in common language she may possibly maintain her place, till Christian truth or common sense shall have banished, even from colloquial intercourse, the lingering relics of heathen superstition.

There is nothing in our experience to lead to the doctrine of necessity. The utmost we can conceive of fate, as was just observed, is the irreversible will of Him, without whose existence nothing is necessary; and his existence being once admitted, fate and necessity are superseded by the wise and equitable system of an universal Providence.

If again we look at our intellectual faculties, they bespeak a God; for how could inanimate matter bestow what evidently it does not possess? The continual restlessness of human curiosity, a principle which can never be satiated while we remain on earth, seems to indicate a futurity; for if complete knowledge and happiness be not things which really exist, how came the idea of them to enter the human mind?—and this not as a vague speculation, but as a principle which forcibly influences our actions during the whole of life. Unless we admit the idea of a Deity, who implanted such principles for ends infinitely wise, we must perpetually wander in the mazes of darkness and uncertainty.

Since then we are ever present to ourselves, and since in ourselves are contained such various proofs of the existence of a God, we are constantly furnished with much to awaken in us the dormant recollection of our dependant state. Every speculation, if correctly and humbly conducted, would thus remind us of Him in whom "we live, and move, and have our being."

If from ourselves we turn to surrounding objects, the same great truth every where presses upon the mind. Creation teaches not only the being but many also of the attributes of the Creator; and the study of it, if conducted with prayer and docility, would lead us to the study of that holy volume in which he is more fully displayed.

How conspicuous, for instance, is his *power!* "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created

these things, that bringeth out their hosts by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might; for that he is strong in power—not one faileth." Surely He who created the universe, and still continues to regulate its concerns, can be no less than omnipotent. The mere mass of matter in existence is inconceivably great; and when this is multiplied into the quantity of motion distributed throughout its parts, the idea is far too vast for human comprehension. The intellect is bewildered; and all that we can distinctly perceive, amidst the stupendous ideas that rush upon the mind, is, that there must be an infinitely powerful Being who regulates the whole.

Hence then we may infer his *wisdom;* to see which still more conspicuously, we might turn from the grand and terrific to objects the most minute and unobserved. The smallest insect displays the wisdom of the Creator as much as an earthquake or a world declares his power. We might take instances almost without the labor of selection. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them *all!*" If we gradually ascend from the varieties of inanimate nature to the innumerable tribes of the vegetable world;—thence to the still more elaborate structure and powers of animals, till we arrive at the unspeakable wonders of the human frame;—and if, having thus taken a survey of individuals and species, we begin to inquire into the natural and almost infinite correspondencies and relations between them, we shall at every step discover indubitable traces of divine wisdom and ability. Amidst myriads of proofs, were we to select only the eyes of animals as convincing marks of the skill of the Creator, not only the atheist, but the thoughtless deist also, would be left without excuse.

Another essential attribute of the Deity, his infinite *goodness*, is not, it must be confessed, so perfectly demonstrable by natural religion as the former. The introduction of moral and physical evil has veiled in a

great measure the display, though it has not disproved the existence, of this divine perfection. Hence, from the gospel only can we learn it to its full extent. Natural reason, whether correctly or otherwise, seems to suggest to us that man had a sort of claim to be happy while he was perfectly good; and therefore not knowing of the state of equitable probation in which our first parents were placed, and their voluntary fall, it must be unable to account for the fact that our Creator has not made our present existence a state of unmixed enjoyment. Here it might be impossible to answer an objector upon merely natural principles, without using arguments, which, though in reality unanswerable, he might not be willing to admit. The idea of a future retribution, for example, would be a clue to unravel many of his difficulties; but this doctrine he might not be disposed to acknowledge. Again—allowing, as revelation informs us, that man has offended his Maker and deserves punishment, the *natural* arguments for the existence of the divine goodness become irresistibly strong; for even punishment is mercy, where the punishment is evidently less than the offence. Weeds and briers are a partial evil; but, compared with what man had deserved, they serve rather to remind him of his transgression than adequately to punish it.

Yet upon the whole, even setting aside for a moment the ideas from revelation which thus effectually prove the possibility of the Creator being beneficent, notwithstanding the quantity of unhappiness that actually exists in the world, we may perceive, even amidst every trouble of life, manifest traces of the divine benevolence. With regard to the inferior animals, we know not sufficiently their nature to be able to form an accurate estimate of their pleasures or their pains. That the former superabound is in most cases evident. Incapable of reflection, or of anticipating futurity, the utmost they can know of pain is the hun-

ger, or thirst, or bodily suffering of the moment; but these are largely counterbalanced by the enjoyments which they hourly possess in satiating their animal wants, and even, perhaps, by the mere feeling of existence, which, independently of positive enjoyment, must be to them a desirable sensation. Their death, when it arrives, is usually sudden, and not perhaps very painful; and being unforeseen, cannot deduct from the general proportion of good which they have previously enjoyed.

But in reference to *man*, we are certain from experience, that creation and preservation are, even in themselves, inestimable benefits. Life is, indeed, a treasure so great, that mankind, with comparatively few awful exceptions, are willing to linger it out, even under the greatest calamities, rather than resign so valuable a blessing. Many of those enjoyments which are least noticed, are yet of incalculable value. Almost every part of nature is evidently designed with a view to our use and comfort. The heavens afford us light and a thousand useful influences, while the earth bears us on her bosom, and unfailingly supplies our wants. It is possible that every mineral, and plant, and animal, may be at length discovered to have been intended for beneficent purposes, which at present we do not so much as suspect. Even as far as relates to man, nothing may have been made in vain. What, for example, could seem less likely to have any beneficial influence on us, or indeed any influence at all, than the satellites of Jupiter, a few masses of matter millions of miles distant from this earth, wholly invisible to the naked eye, and consequently quite unknown to the majority of mankind. Yet, by the aid of telescopes even these distant objects have become of very great importance to the navigator, and by consequence to mankind at large. May they not then be produced as one, among innumerable testimonies, of the intention of Providence indirectly to benefit us in things in which

we might least have expected to find any traces of love to mankind ?*

The deist then must allow, and how much more the professed Christian, that there are on every side of us objects sufficient to impress constantly upon our minds the existence, and *some* of the attributes, of the Creator. We know not the whole of his perfections. Even the volume of revelation itself may have wisely passed by many attributes of the Deity, which either we could not have understood, or which, if understood, it might have been useless for us to know. But from what we,

* The writer is far from attempting, even were he able, to enter into the vast subject of the perfections of God, as displayed in the works of nature. He has rather alluded to it than begun to discuss it. There is happily a large variety of works on this interesting subject; and were there none but Archdeacon Paley's judicious epitome of what others had recorded, and he himself had verified, enough would have been written incontrovertibly to prove the point. A great merit in Paley is that correctness of judgment and soberness of fancy which prevented his bringing forward any thing as proof which was not fairly entitled to the appellation. Several other authors, in the same track, have not been so judicious. The "Religious Philosopher" of Nieuwentyt, for example, from whom Paley seems to have derived several of his most valuable hints, is something exceptionable in this respect, frequently adducing as proof what no atheist could admit to be conclusive, and what therefore no judicious Christian would desire to see employed in so doubtful a service.

Valuable as is the Natural Theology of Paley, it might, perhaps, have been rendered still more so, had the author entered a little into those proofs which are derived from chemistry, and which, since the new era of that science, have been multiplied with astonishing rapidity. Till within a few years, arguments from this quarter would have been little understood; but since chemistry has become so general an object of study, they rise greatly in importance. We see the wonderful yet simple methods taken to apply the apparent waste of nature. We observe every particle of undecompounded matter capable of going through a perpetual round of useful offices, and of combining in various forms with others for that important purpose. What, for example, can be more wonderful than that the elements of common atmospheric air, the essential support of animal existence, should be composed of the very same elastic fluids which constitute, when mixed in a different proportion, the most corrosive acid in nature? Had chance been the chemist employed to mix the gases for the use of mankind, we might have occasionally expected such a mistake in the proportion as would have converted the salubrious breeze into the pestiferous fumes of *aqua-fortis*, and have destroyed a city or a nation without possibility of escape.

as Christians, *do* profess to understand, and even from what is acknowledged by deists themselves, we are necessarily led to inferences which may put to shame every thoughtless and inconsistent believer in the true and only revelation.

Let us view the matter a little more in detail. The first duty of natural religion, a duty admitted even by those who reject revelation, is to contemplate and venerate our Creator. If we but glance at his ineffable perfections, what theme can appear so worthy of our serious consideration? Created by his hand, and supported by his power, it is surely *reasonable* that we should reverentially fix our thoughts upon his transcendent majesty. We should carefully, yet humbly, inquire into his nature and attributes, in order that we may adore him as we ought. If we possess the gift of reason, what duty can be more evident than the diligent exertion of that reason in contemplating the works and prerogatives of its divine Bestower? For what purpose were curiosity and the love of knowledge bestowed upon man, if not, among other things, to prompt him to investigate all that may be humbly learned respecting the Divinity, through the medium of his providence and his works? If his creation is so wonderful and admirable, how much more wonderful and to be admired is its admirable Author! The workmanship was doubtless specially intended to remind us constantly of the hand by which it was framed. We cannot, indeed, know God to perfection; and the very wish to discover more than he has been pleased to reveal would be presumptuous; but there is an obvious difference between the daring researches of an unhallowed curiosity, and the devout efforts of a mind which longs to become more and more acquainted with its Creator, only that it may obtain new motives for love and admiration.

The due contemplation of God, in addition to its immediate moral advantages, is the most delightful

subject which can occupy a reasonable being. Admiration is always a pleasing sensation; and how great, how ennobling, must it become, when God is its object! There is no created being, however vast or wonderful, that can perfectly fill the imagination, and bound the researches of man. Even the truths unfolded by astronomy, though the most sublime that the universe can suggest, may become at length familiarized to the mind, and in consequence fail to raise it to its accustomed pitch of admiration and delight. But God is an object of contemplation so immeasurably great—his nature and perfections are so completely inexhaustible—such vast and unexpected ideas arise from every new contemplation of his essence and his works, that we need not fear that we can ever become satiated with the astonishing theme.

From the contemplation of God, even our reason seems to point out various duties corresponding to the perfections which we discover in his nature. We ought evidently to be occupied in reverential *admiration* while we view his unsearchable wisdom, his infinity, and his unbounded power. With what intensity should *love* glow in our bosoms, while we survey his works of beneficence which so conspicuously appear on every side! How should *gratitude* expand our hearts, while we reflect upon the innumerable blessings which we enjoy, beginning with that primary blessing of existence, which put us into a capacity for enjoying all the rest! His justice, when viewed, as it ever must be, in connexion with our acknowledged imperfections, demands our *fear;* his mercy calls for *thankfulness* and *hope*. We should repose in him our *trust*, because he is faithful and immutable: we should aspire after a nearer union with him, because in that consists our happiness and the perfection of our nature.

Again—prayer and praise are duties which even natural religion suggests to nations the most unenlightened; and though the mode of expressing them is

often so highly offensive to reason as to be not only unworthy of the Almighty, (for what can any man give that is worthy of Him?) but even a disgrace to the worshipper himself, yet the obligation to these duties still remains fixed and unimpaired, notwithstanding the absurdities to which human imperfection has given birth. It is true that the Christian only can worship God in an acceptable manner, because no other person is acquainted with the sole Mediator between God and man; but the duty itself would be binding, had Christianity never been revealed. A prayerless and thankless person offends not only against the specific requisitions of the gospel, but against the antecedent and unalterable obligations of his nature.

Every man, then, who is conscious that he is dependent upon God, must feel that he ought to implore his blessing. The majority even of deistical writers have contended for this point.* The often-heard objection, that prayer derogates from the honor of the Creator, either by seeming to imply that he is unacquainted with our wants, or that, knowing them, he is unwilling to supply them, might be readily confuted, even upon the principles of what is called natural religion. In the first place, prayer does not derogate from the supposition of the divine *intelligence*, because the very act shows that we believe that the Almighty knows what is felt in our hearts, or uttered by our lips, which, when we consider the number of worshippers in the whole world, could not be the case were he not

* It must be again observed that prayer and praise, and the other duties which have been just mentioned as dictates of natural religion, are not strictly natural; but have rather been conveyed by traditions more or less pure, from some of those revelations which God made in the early ages of the world to mankind. But since they are admitted by most deists themselves, they properly apply to the present argument, which is simply to show, that if those who deny revelation think it is expedient to admit and inculcate so much, how perfectly inexcusable are those, who, professing to acknowledge the infinitely superior light of Christianity, yet live far beneath the requisitions of a deistical creed.

both omnipresent and omniscient. Neither, in the second place, does it indicate distrust in his *goodness*, but the contrary; for who, but the ignorant and superstitious barbarian, would pray to a malignant being from whom he expected no favor in return? Prayer is the expression of subordination and dependence, and, *as such*, is a natural obligation; to which revelation has added *new* motives, by enjoining it as the appointed means of grace by which the Almighty conveys the blessings which he sees fit to bestow.

Thanksgiving is still more evidently a natural duty than prayer; for to enjoy food and clothing, and all the necessaries and conveniences of life, without thinking of the source from which they are derived, or bestowing in return our gratitude and acknowledgments, would be plainly contrary to right reason and the boasted fitness of things. Totally to omit these duties of prayer and praise, is virtually to deny that there is a Being who deserves them; greatly to neglect them, even though we should not wholly omit them, is to imply, that although we do not formally deny his existence, we neither habitually fear his anger nor desire his approbation.

It is possible that many nominal Christians, who suffer themselves to be carelessly whirled in the vortex of fashion, thoughtless of their Creator and their eternal destination, may be sometimes more startled at considerations of this kind, than even by an enumeration of the more express duties enjoined by Christianity; because here they cannot possibly have any room for the frequent plea of unnecessary strictness, since nothing has as yet been urged but what the graver class of deists themselves acknowledge to be right and reasonable.

Let then the nominal Christian seriously inquire,—I will not say whether he has lived up to the full spirit of his transcendently holy religion,—but whether he has even fulfilled in a decent measure, the first ac-

knowledged obligations of what the deist himself considers as merely natural duty to his Creator. Has he reverenced his name; contemplated his perfections; yielded himself to his service? Has he constantly applied to him by humble prayer for every needed blessing, and as constantly returned fervent thanks for every benefaction? Has he uniformly thought of him with veneration, and never uttered his name but in terms appropriate, so far as possible, to his exalted majesty? Has he at no time spoken or performed any thing that seemed to imply contempt or forgetfulness of his presence and perfections?

Would not a deist himself, if living up to the requisitions of his scanty creed, feel shocked at the irreverence with which some professed Christians act towards their Creator? A person who is in the habit of tracing the marks of supernatural goodness and power, in the various objects which surround him, and who, in consequence, felt deeply impressed with a sense of the presence of God, if he went no further, would avoid, we might suppose, every thing profane or derogatory to the divine perfections and dignity. As one example among many, would not the stage, as at present conducted among professed Christians, be disgusting to such a person, on account of its manifest and undeniable impiety? Would not also the trifling and irreverent appeals to the Almighty, which are constantly heard in ordinary conversation, shock the ears of one who felt but as much awe and veneration towards him as a loyal subject feels for his temporal monarch?

To the credit, however, of revealed religion, it may be fairly asked, Where can a deist, thus practically susceptible in what relates to the honor of God, be found? It is a collateral proof of the divine character of the gospel, that no person is ever discovered to be a devout and consistent theist, who is not also a true Christian. Natural religion, at least that which is so

called, may seem to point out the broad outline of duties; but Christianity alone can incline the heart to perform them. No man adequately or truly venerates the name of God, who has not learned this important precept from his revealed word.

Love to our Creator is so evidently a reasonable duty, that the obligation scarcely needs to be systematically proved. The motives to it are as innumerable as the blessings which we enjoy. He is the original fountain of amiableness; and whatever is lovely, is in reality truly so only in proportion as it resembles something in the divine nature. We cannot be said to love God truly, unless we love him supremely. To love him only as a rival with any one of his creatures, is to degrade him to the measure of a finite good. He must, even by the decisions of reason, be paramount in our affections, and every thing must be rendered subservient to his glory. But have we performed this duty? Does our love prompt to universal obedience; to a full and implicit performance of every dictate of conscience, from the moment in which we become intelligent creatures to the moment in which we return to our Creator to give an account of our actions? Surely we can give no reply to these interrogations but what must condemn us, even on the ground of natural obligation.

If from the catalogue of duties which naturally flow from the acknowledgment of the being and perfections of God, another might be mentioned, which, like the preceding, applies *à fortiori* to the professed Christian, it should be that of acknowledging his providence. The very Greeks and Romans, and most other civilized heathens, have admitted this duty. By the classical writers, their fabled deities were esteemed the efficient agents in every concern. Infinite as were the errors, the crimes, and the absurdities of heathenism, the express denial of a superintending Providence was confined to a few self-sufficient philoso-

phists. Virgil is almost proverbial for tracing every thing to the gods; and though nothing can be more absurd than the offices which he and others made them to perform, yet the general abstract idea of the existence of a divine agency, though miserably abused, was substantially true.

Professed Christians, it is to be feared, oftentimes derogate essentially from the honor of their Creator, by a rejection, not indeed absolute, but certainly virtual, of his providential interposition in the government of the world. Though they do not expressly deny the presence of God, they forget it, and seem glad to interpose any thing whatever to shield themselves from his agency. How common is it to hear men speak of *nature* in such a way as evidently to prove that they are very far from being accustomed to look beyond nature up to nature's God. Accustomed to the constant presence of a vicegerent, they overlook the fact that there is a Superior, whose commands that vicegerent implicitly obeys.

It shows, indeed, the wisdom and the power of God, that he was able so to arrange the system, both of the natural and moral world, that *visible* interpositions of his hand should not often be required; but he by no means intended that we should, on that account, attribute to his creature the praise that belongs only to himself. In describing the creation of the universe, Moses never speaks of nature as an agent. The heathens made her a deity, and, as such, paid her divine honors; and even the philosophers of France emulated, in the open face of revelation, the same absurdity and impiety. The habit of thus speaking of things corporeal, or even inanimate, as endued with intellectual powers, was one fruitful source of ancient polytheism and superstition. The vulgar idea of nature, though almost naturalized in Christendom, may perhaps be traced back to the peripatetic philosophy, in which the world was considered as eternal, the divine agency

being consequently excluded in its formation, if not also in its government. Every person who really believes in a God, should be cautious of employing language which seems, and was by some pseudo philosophers really intended, to derogate from his providential interference.

But however excusable mere error in *language* might be considered, the present is a matter of plain fact. The inadequacy or inaccuracy of language is in this case too true an index of the inadequacy or inaccuracy of mental conception. For it is obvious that a large portion of professed Christians by no means habitually view the Creator of the world as its constant governor. "God is not in all their thoughts:" they have no sense of his presence or his agency; so that if we except a few occasional ceremonies, paid, perhaps, rather as a mark of respect to the customs of their country than from reverence to their adorable Creator, we might fairly doubt whether they were in reality persuaded of the divine existence and government.

The ancient sect of the Epicureans was more consistent. Its advocates explicitly denied the providence of God, because they had no such conception of his perfections as to suppose him capable of governing all parts of his creation at the same moment. Whilst he was rolling his thunders over the sands of the torrid zone, they could not believe that he was present also to "pour out his ice like morsels" at the distant poles, or to fertilize with his showers, and refresh with his breezes, a thousand intervening tracts.

But that those who acknowledge God's omnipotence, his ubiquity, and his omniscience, should fail of being constantly penetrated with the deepest feelings of adoration, we might suppose impossible, were it not confirmed by universal experience. Absurd as atheism has always and justly been considered, is it not, if possible, still more strange to profess to believe in a God, and yet to act as though his existence were a fable?—

a charge, however, to which no small number of professed Christians are undeniably obnoxious.

These reflections upon that part of natural religion, so called, which relates to our contemplation and veneration of the Deity, cannot be better concluded than with the following passage from the works of the devout Robert Boyle, an author whose high merit it is, that we cannot study his writings for the sake of becoming acquainted with human philosophy, without also being continually elevated to a still more noble object, by his comprehensive and adoring views of the ever-blessed Creator :—

"I think then that it becomes us to use an awful circumspection; not only when we make philosophical inquiries about God, that is, when we presume to discourse of Him, but when we solemnly design to praise Him; for it is one thing to say true things, and another to say things worthy of God. Our ideas of Him may be the best we are able to frame, and yet may far better express the greatness of our veneration for Him, than the immensity of his perfection; and even those notions that may be worthy of the most intelligent of men, will fall extremely short of being worthy of the incomprehensible God. The brightest and least unlike idea we can frame of God is infinitely more inferior, with regard to him, than a parhelion is with regard to the sun. He has not, in my opinion, the truest veneration for God, who can set out his excellencies and prerogatives in the most high and pompous expressions; but he who, willingly, has a deep and real sense of the unmeasurable inferiority of himself, and his best ideas, to the unbounded and unparalleled perfections of his Maker. And, as even our hymns and praises of the Supreme Being deserve our blushes, and need his pardon; what confusion will one day cover the faces of those, who not only speak slightly and carelessly, but even contemptuously of that supreme and infinitely perfect Being, to whom they owe those very

faculties which they so ungratefully and impiously misemploy? Indeed, such trancendent excellencies as are the divine, might justly discourage us from offering so much as to celebrate them, if infinite goodness were not one of them. I shall not therefore allow myself the presumption of pretending to make a panegyric on God, but content myself with a humble adoration of those perfections whereof my utmost praises would rather express my own weakness than their excellence; since, of this ineffable object the highest things that can be expressed in words must fall short; for words cannot express him."

If from our duties to our Creator we proceed to those which respect our neighbor, the habitual neglect and criminality of too many professed Christians will appear scarcely less conspicuous than in the former case.

We owe to our fellow-creatures, upon the admission of deists themselves, perfect justice and benevolence; but which of these virtues can any man be said to exhibit in its full extent? The writings of many of the heathens, how imperfect soever their own practice, are standing mementos of our deficiency. Cicero even inculcates the duty of loving others as ourselves; yet this simple rule of natural duty is what no man can say that he has completely followed. Our highest stretch of philanthropy is scarcely a visible approach towards this almost inaccessible spot;—inaccessible, not on account of the essential nature of things, but in consequence of the lapsed conditions and sinful passions of mankind.

But it would be needless to enter into a full exposition of our violated duties towards our neighbor; or even of those which respect ourselves. To live up to the full and most rigorous dictates of conscience, in spite of all the suggestions of ease, or pleasure, or profit, is so obvious a law of our nature, that the heathens denominated conscience a god, and consid-

ered disobedience to its suggestions a high and flagrant breach of moral duty. In short, what ought to be our line of action on the mere ground of natural religion, may be fully learned from a remark of Plato, that we ought as far as possible to assimilate ourselves to the Deity ;—a precept which, thus acknowledged by a pagan, ought surely to press with far greater force on the conscience of every believer in the Christian dispensation.

But to quit the present line of argument, so far as it is connected with the mere admission of the being of a God, we may proceed to another alleged dogma of natural religion,—*the existence of a future state.* It is true, (as we shall see more fully in a future part of these remarks,) that this doctrine was not and could not be completely ascertained by natural reason ; yet as it is often admitted by deistical writers, and, *when once known*, is capable of considerable proof from natural argument and analogy, it ought to find a place even in the present imperfect enumeration.

It is utterly improbable, on the principles of mere reason, that so wise and good a being as we acknowledge the Creator to be, should have bestowed upon us such exalted faculties as we possess, solely for the comparatively mean purposes of the present life. Boundless as are our desires after knowledge, no human intellect ever yet understood any one science to perfection ; yet, is it probable that the God of infinite order and congruity created the high powers of man to cut them short just when they begin to attain their vigor and capacity for action ? Are the expanded minds of the best and wisest mortals to be annihilated, and all their capacities and capabilities in a moment destroyed ? This is not consistent with the analogy of the vegetable creation, when it declines at the approach of winter, and buries its glories in the earth. The atheist may indeed, in full accordance with his own principles, imagine mankind to be as accidentally

ended as he conceives him to have been accidentally formed : but really to believe in a God, and yet to imagine that he created the human soul for the mere purposes of the present existence, is a glaring inconsistency with the views which we profess to entertain of the wisdom of the Creator. Can we conceive that machines so noble were formed for the mere purpose of being almost immediately shattered to pieces? Is it not then morally certain, to say nothing of revelation, that our Creator intends us for a state where all the incipient faculties of the human mind shall expand and flourish to all eternity?

Besides, if, as we all allow, we are under the moral government of an equitable God, and if, moreover, happiness and misery are not in this life proportioned to the various degrees of virtue and vice, there must *necessarily* be another world. This, it needs scarcely be observed, is the strongest argument derivable from mere reason for a future state ; but that it is not absolutely irresistible, may be inferred from the doubts of the wisest heathen philosophers, who rather hoped for an eternal existence than confidently expected it. It was the gospel only that could fully bring "life and immortality to light."

Now, if there be a future world, and if mankind are thus under the moral government of their Creator in the present, human life is a probationary state, and must be considered as subject to various duties corresponding with such an idea. But do the great body of nominal Christians really live under such a prevailing impression? Do they constantly view themselves as responsible beings, and do they act accordingly? Are the giddy flutterers of the day seriously impressed with the thought that life is a deposit which is neither to remain unemployed, nor to be spent in frivolity ; but to be "put out to usury," that it may turn to good account in the hour of final retribution?

But to pass by persons of this more trifling cast of

manners, even others who are neither inactive nor immoral, neither useless nor unamiable, may too often be open to the charge of not living up to the idea of a state of probation. For, do they display that acquiescence in affliction, that resignation in disappointment, which would necessarily characterize the conduct of a man who habitually felt,—not only that these things are the inflictions of a wise and merciful Creator,—but that they were expressly intended to prepare him for a future state, in which he shall fully perceive the propriety of every apparently adverse event, and find it counterpoised with an eternal and unspeakable "weight of glory?"

Is not then every murmur, every complaint, every feeling of discontent with our condition, a crime in one who acknowledges, in theory at least, that he is placed under the merciful and infinitely wise government of his Creator? Surely the most moral and amiable person must confess that his thoughts and language have been too often such as would have given the highest offence to an earthly monarch, and must therefore be far more culpable as applied to the omniscient Ruler of the universe. Who would submit to endure from a child in a state of pupilage, and for whom we were conscious that we were acting in the most wise and tender manner, a thousandth part of those constant repinings and rebellious thoughts which our Creator has daily witnessed in ourselves? The man who should fully realize the idea of his life being mercifully as well as wisely intended for a scene of trial and not of permanent repose, would learn to lie passive in his Maker's hand, and would unrepiningly, and even cheerfully, submit to the awards of his equitable providence.

Again—is not every feeling of envy and malice, and still more, every attempt at revenge, a tacit impeachment of the justice of God? Does it not even as it were rob him of that judicial prerogative which the idea of a future state necessarily implies? The world would

witness but little of that quick resentment at injuries, and that ardor for retaliating them, which are now so common, were men constantly to act up to those duties which flow from the belief of the present life being merely a state of being in which the all-wise Judge of the world beholds both the injured and the injurer, with the intention of deciding equitably between them at a future day. To have personally revenged an injury, would, even at a human tribunal, be considered an affront to the majesty of the laws, and prevent our obtaining that redress to which we should otherwise have been entitled. Irritated, therefore, as we might be, by an unprovoked aggression, our respect for the laws of our country, even irrespectively of other considerations, would probably restrain us from immediate revenge. Now, the *disposition* to retaliate is, in reference to the laws of God, what the *act* of retaliation is to the laws of our country; since each equally impeaches the justice or the power of the legislator. Did we therefore habitually repose the same confidence in the ultimate equity of the decisions of the moral Governor of the world, respecting the feeling and the motive, which we repose in a human judicature respecting the outward act, every thought of revenge would vanish from our minds, and we should commit our cause humbly and implicitly to Him who will equitably survey and impartially determine.

From the preceding remarks on the obligations of natural religion, it will instantly appear how little force there is in the common allegation of inconsistent Christians, that though they may not have performed all that the requisitions of the gospel demand, yet that upon the whole, they have done all that can be *reasonably* expected. So far, however, from this being the fact, there is probably not a single injunction even of what is claimed as natural religion with which they have fully complied. Had Christianity never been revealed, they could not, in the eye of reason, have

confidently stood before their Maker as persons who had discharged those acknowledged obligations which many even of the heathen acknowledge themselves bound to fulfil; unless, indeed, blinded by a false philosophy, they could assume the unexampled arrogance of a Rousseau, and present their very vices before the Almighty Judge, daring him, as it were, to do his worst. But can we suppose that Rousseau ever fulfilled his boast? Before his fellow-men he might with impunity affect to believe that amidst all his crimes, (to the amplitude of which the very pages that record the boast bear sufficient witness,) he was entitled to the approbation of his Maker: but if, at the moment in which he arrived in the divine presence, the excuses and palliations which he has recorded in his Confessions were all that he had to propose, how unspeakably awful must have been his disappointment! When we picture to ourselves scenes of this kind in all their terrors, how great should be our gratitude for that dispensation of mercy, by which pardon is revealed gratuitously to us, through the vicarious obedience and death of the incarnate Son of God! Even Rousseau, approaching, with penitence, humility, self-renunciation, and faith, would not have been rejected by Him who embraced with the extended arms of mercy the repentant thief upon the cross.

Without, however, anticipating remarks of this nature, which will occur in the future prosecution of the argument, it is time to reply to an objection that may be urged by very different classes of readers, namely, that if natural religion enjoin so much as has been described, Christianity is rendered unnecessary. This conclusion, however, by no means follows from what has been advanced; for even though enlightened reason should be admitted as teaching *much*, it is very possible that it may not teach *all* that is essentially necessary to be known; and this will incontrovertibly appear to be the case, when we consider the great

point in which natural religion, so called, with all its supposed excellencies, avowedly falls short. But in the mean time it should again be remembered, that what has been adduced for the sake of argument, as natural religion, may not in reality be such, though admitted as true even by deists themselves. Most devout Christians will attribute the *whole* to revelation; and even the deist must acknowledge that Christianity has added much to improve the system; for it is observable, that the classical writers of Greece and Rome speak very little of those more spiritual and elevated virtues which are so constantly and fully expatiated upon by almost every advocate for natural religion who has written since the revelation of the gospel, and which betray the source from which they were derived. Upon every hypothesis, therefore, the gospel is shown to be not only desirable, but absolutely necessary, for the promulgation of the code of moral duty.

So far, indeed, from Christianity being superseded by natural religion, the latter, were it sincerely followed up, would rather teach us the necessity of the former. Many of the heathen philosophers wished for a divine revelation; and some ventured so far as confidently to predict it. The acknowledged imperfections of their own system led them to look for something better. Even independently of that great point which we shall show made a revelation absolutely *necessary*, several others might be mentioned which seemed to render it highly *desirable*.

Love to God, for example, has been urged as an acknowledged duty of what is called natural religion; but how can we properly love him with whom we are unacquainted? Without a divine revelation, we cannot be assured that we have not mistaken the character of our Maker, and are in consequence worshipping an unknown God. Again—*love* desires to become conversant with its object; especially love to God, which, being founded upon a knowledge of his attributes, of

those, at least, by which we feel ourselves most benefited,—must be variously heightened and modified according to the degrees of our spiritual information. Lastly, *love* prompts to obedience, and therefore implants a corresponding desire to be more and more acquainted with the will of the Almighty, without a knowledge of which, our services, we might conclude, would prove unacceptable in his sight. It is incredible therefore that a man should fully practise the duties of natural religion, and not feel the need of rules of conduct more certain and explicit than unenlightened reason can suggest.

Thus then to a person who was adequately impressed with the obligations of the alleged "religion of nature," and was anxious unreservedly to obey them, a revelation would be highly *desirable*. Suppose therefore that a system, such as Christianity professes itself to be, should be presented to his notice as the very object of which he had been in search. Surely his attention will be excited. He will immediately perceive, that, if Christianity be true, it will effectually put an end to all his former uncertainties. At all events, professing to come from that Being, whom, by the hypothesis, he already loves and serves to the best of his natural power, it cannot fail to meet with his respectful and impartial attention. To oppose it without examination, might "haply be found fighting against God." Exercising therefore all those dispositions which we have supposed him to possess, he begins fairly to examine into its evidences; and no man who has fairly examined into them himself can doubt what would be the result of his meditations.*

* The *evidences* of Christianity, for which this might seem to be the proper place in a regular treatise upon Natural and Revealed Religion, are purposely omitted; not only because they are far better illustrated in other works than it would be in the power of the writer of these pages to illustrate them, but because the present Essay was intended to apply, not to deists, but to those who profess to believe in the gospel, how inattentive soever they may be to its real spirit and design.

Christianity being thus once fixed in his mind as a divine revelation, would not his conduct, supposing him to be endued with those ingenuous dispositions which have been already imagined, begin immediately to correspond with his improved conceptions? Having admitted the gospel as a creed, might we not fairly expect him to show practically his veneration for its doctrines, and his admission of its precepts? Would it not be his highest wish to be moulded into its spirit; that as he had served God to the utmost of his knowledge in his former state, so his new life might equally correspond to the greater extent of his religious information?

Here then again we perceive, what has already several times forced itself upon the attention, how completely every thoughtless professor of the true religion is condemned by the mere light of natural conscience. *Reason* teaches us that what comes from the Almighty deserves the highest attention; yet how many persons, even in this enlightened country,—by no means excluding the more decent and moral circles of society,—remain as indifferent to the sacred volume, as though it had been long ago proved to be a forgery. Reason again suggests that if the will of the Creator is known, it should be implicitly followed; yet of those who already know it, or at least have the means of information in their power, are not a large portion, are not even the majority, as thoughtless upon the subject as though they had been born amongst the most unenlightened nations? Pursuing the daily round of busy, or idle, or of dissipated life, and heedless, not only of the peculiarities of the gospel, but even of the first alleged principles of natural religion, they sink into futurity with scarcely any thing of the Christian except the name, and consequently with as little *rational* hope of the rewards of the gospel as though they had never been baptized.

True it is, that the preceding hypothesis, of a per-

son in a state of nature thus fully acting up to what are supposed, for the sake of argument, to be the principles of uninspired religion, is wholly unsupported by experience and fact. But, for the purpose for which it was adduced, it is fully sufficient; namely, to show what would necessarily be the conduct of such a person, were such a person to be found; and to infer from this conclusion the folly and even falsehood of that common plea,—"True, I have not attended much to the niceties of religion, but I have lived, upon the whole, a decent and *reasonable* life, and hope therefore to be saved at last." Now, if the foregoing remarks be true, no man in an enlightened Christian country, can be said to have lived in a *reasonable* manner, who is not a practical Christian. Enlightened reason, we have seen, would begin by teaching the knowledge of a God, and the essentials of our duty towards him. This sense of duty would excite to an examination of what professed to be a divine revelation of his mind and will. Examination, if fairly conducted, would end in a full assurance of the truth of the gospel; and a full assurance of its truth would lead, upon the principles of reason, to an acquiescence in its doctrines, and an habitual desire to live according to its requisitions. Surely then no person is truly rational in his conduct, who, with the means of information within his reach, has not become a Christian in the very tenor and disposition of his soul. The most unreasonable life that can be conceived, is that of a person who professes to believe in the religion of Christ, and yet lives as careless of its true spirit and extent as though it were allowedly untrue.

Thus have we seen that Christianity is far from being superseded by natural religion, even supposing that revelation contained nothing more than a lucid display of our duties and obligations to our Creator. But this is very far from being the whole extent of the gospel. Even admitting that natural religion were complete in

its requisitions and commands, there would still be a fatal deficiency in the system; for it is evident, that in teaching us our duty it makes no provision in case of failure. It proceeds upon the supposition that a mutual contract exists between us and our Creator, and that nothing has occurred to violate the terms of that contract. It lays down its laws and specifies its sanctions, but it fails to point out in what way even an inadvertent offender may be pardoned.

We perceive then that the religion of nature regards man as he ought to be, and as revelation informs us he once was, rather than as he is at present found. The prime law of our creation was full obedience to God:—"This do, and thou shalt live." Such was the equitable "covenant of works" under which we were created; and should this covenant be broken on the part of man, human reason could invent no certain means of reconciliation. Infinite justice must necessarily be inflexible; for if it was not repugnant to the attributes of the Deity to attach punishment to transgression, it cannot be so to inflict rigidly what he had equitably threatened.

Let us then *assume*, (what shall be hereafter proved,) that man has grossly violated the conditions of natural religion. The displeasure of his Creator must be a necessary consequence of that violation; since it would be absurd to suppose a law demanding obedience without a penal sanction to insure its fulfilment. An injunction without a penalty would be futile. Even the most mitigated and kind command of a tender parent to an obedient child is tacitly enforced by the fear of that parent's displeasure in case of disobedience. On the assumption then of our having violated the primary law and obligation of our existence, in what manner is the penalty to be avoided, or the forfeited enjoyment to be retained? Here natural religion, taken in its widest signification, and including all its boasted provisions, begins to fail. It may condemn, but it cannot

pardon : it may teach some of the immutable principles of duty, but is not adequate to the case of a man who has confessedly broken his allegiance, and has thus become obnoxious to the divine displeasure.

It will of course be objected, that the religion of nature suggests *repentance* as a compensation which the Almighty is willing to accept in place of perfect obedience. This assertion is in fact the very bulwark, not only of Deism, but of Socinianism also, and of every other heresy that has relation to the doctrine of the atonement. Upon this point hinges the most important part of the controversy between the friends and the enemies of revelation ; for if it could be proved that God is willing to accept penitence as an atonement, and that this important fact was discoverable by human reason, the *absolute necessity* for a divine revelation would be done away, and Christianity must in consequence be content to stand on much lower ground than at present ; and instead of proclaiming itself, as it now does, the *only* system that is commensurate with human wants, or worth human acceptance, it must be satisfied with that portion of credit which it would still deserve as the *best* religion amongst various others, all radically good.

We need not however entertain any anxiety for the honor of the gospel as it stands affected by the subject under consideration ; since it is impossible to prove, either by reason or by revelation, that God is willing to accept repentance as an atonement for sin. The analogies are all on the other side. Human legislatures, (and "how can we reason but from what we know?") are not accustomed to forgive an offender, especially one whose crimes are numerous and aggravated, merely because he feels sorrow for the past, and promises a more correct line of conduct in future. Should it be replied, that human inquisition cannot determine the degree of credit due to such professions, and that therefore the two cases essentially differ ; it

may be urged in return, that admitting the delinquent were sincere, yet, for the general welfare, and the peace of others, an example must be made, lest the impunity with which his offence was passed over should produce evil effects on society at large. Now may not some such analogy occur in the moral government of our Creator? May it not be necessary, for ends infinitely wise and good, that past sin should be punished, even where the offender is really desirous of amendment in future? It is not intended to be asserted that such absolutely *is* the fact, but only that it possibly *may* be so, and that consequently human reason cannot unreservedly promise forgiveness on the ground of repentance and amendment.

The widely-spread custom of sacrificing animals, in order, as the worshippers suppose, to placate the Deity, is still further proof that there is no natural and necessary appearance of connexion between mere repentance and forgiveness. For if natural reason sanctioned the idea now under consideration, whence arose so remarkable a rite as that of vicarious sacrifice? If, as the Christian believes, from early revelations, or the record of those revelations in the Mosaic scriptures, the question is decided at once in favor of inspiration, and the doctrine therein contained of the atonement; but if from merely human invention, it follows, that repentance alone did not appear to natural reason a sufficient atonement for sin, but that a substituted sacrifice was conceived necessary to complete the effect.

The light of nature, it is true, instructs men not to violate the known commands of God; and conscience, illuminated by it, renders them uneasy upon the commission of a crime. Hence, in a certain degree, natural feeling and reflection incite to repentance and resolutions of amendment. But this is all. A dreadful uncertainty would still exist. The past would remain indelible. Judging by the natural fitness of things,

nothing could appear less probable than pardon; for rebellion against God is an immeasurable crime, and cannot necessarily be atoned for by any subsequent obedience, especially as that obedience is itself no more than is required by the original law of our creation, and therefore cannot constitute a supererogated stock of merit to set against other deficiencies. Besides, the offence was perhaps repeated and aggravated: what natural or reasonable plea therefore could be devised to divert the award of punishment? In vain was any law given, if its stipulation might be infringed with impunity. If penitence were all the atonement which a violated law required, who would not repent rather than be punished; especially as he might deliberately offend again as soon as a new temptation occurred, and again wash off his guilt by a renewed repentance; thus rendering all law and threatening of no avail?

Repentance is indeed most reasonable, and it is also the first step towards a return to duty. But the utmost that natural religion can attribute to it is the probable deprecation of future punishment by the endeavor to avoid future delinquency. Not to have repented would have been an additional and positive crime; repentance therefore appears to natural reason so far, but so far only, an atoning virtue.

Had repentance been really suggested by natural reason as an atonement for sin, we might have fairly expected that its measure and extent should have been defined. But is this the case? Are there two individuals in the world whose natural perceptions on this subject are precisely the same? Upon the principles of commutation, who shall decide how many years of repentance are required for so many years of vice? What depth must our repentance acquire before we have reason to hope that it has atoned for a given offence? How often may we violate God's law, and yet continue to expurgate ourselves by penitential

tears? What is the exact proportion between the repentance that ought to be felt by different classes of transgressors? Can a person who has offended against his natural conscience for a given number of years be pardoned at last? Where, in short, is the exact point at which hope ends and despair begins?

Now, if natural reason cannot decide these and similar questions of conscience, we may conclude that it did not suggest the original idea from which they arise; for to have given the rule without pointing out its method of application would be to little purpose. If natural religion indicate that repentance is allowable as a compensation for vice, it ought to teach also how we may judge of its proportions; otherwise a scrupulous mind may torment itself beyond the necessity of the case, while the more sanguine offender, in attempting to atone for his faults, may so miscalculate the time or degree of penitence which is an adequate commutation, as to deceive himself, and thus fail of obtaining his object at last.

The idea of repentance being accepted as an atonement seems to arise from a consciousness that we have nothing better to bestow, combined with the hope that if we give all that we possess, a merciful God will not look for more. But does not this expectation, while it seems to magnify the clemency of God, essentially derogate from his justice? The attributes of Deity are necessarily in unison: it is only from our imperfect conception of them that they are made apparently to clash with each other. Whatever justice demands, infinite love and pity will equally approve. Ignorant mortals may not be able to blend those seemingly adverse attributes into one harmonious whole, but that there is such a union of them in the divine nature we cannot doubt. To apply the idea of "amiable weakness" to our Maker, is immeasurably absurd. If we are to suppose that there is an attribute in God so similar to the human feeling of unchastised pity as to be at eternal war with the execution of his just denunciations, we introduce

such a schism into the Divinity as must subvert the whole system of his moral government and regulations.

Against this doctrine of repentance being a natural atonement for sin, it is no trivial objection, that the most virtuous and sagacious heathens did not make the discovery. Socrates himself, the very high-priest of deism, candidly allowed that he could perceive no way in which the Deity might consistently forgive human transgressions. He felt that there was a radical defect in the religion of nature, and, in consequence, doubted not but that the Almighty would at length condescend to reveal, by some divinely-taught instructer, that most interesting of mysteries, how he will see fit to pardon sin. This hope—it might almost be denominated this prophecy—of Socrates, has been realized by the Christian dispensation. How absurd then is it to build our expectations for futurity upon a system which appeared fundamentally defective in the eyes of its greatest advocates, and which is now confessedly superseded by the brighter discoveries of revelation!

By persons who know nothing of the general complexion of the religion which they profess, except what may have been carelessly derived from a few current and ill-understood phrases, such as "making our peace with God," and atoning for our sins by sincere repentance, it may be objected that the preceding remarks, if they prove any thing, prove far too much, and that they affect the gospel as much as they do the religion of nature.

This objection, however, proceeds on a radical misconception of the whole genius of Christianity. Revealed religion by no means recognizes the doctrine of repentance atoning for sin: nay, it is grounded upon the fundamental principle that nothing human *could* make atonement. It presupposes that man was wholly unable to render compensation, or any thing that might be accepted as such. "Repentance for the remission of sins" is indeed an important and conspicuous doctrine of Christianity; but we are further taught, not that

our repentance, but that the merit of our Redeemer, constitutes the procuring cause of that remission. Repentance is a means, or medium, or instrument; but must not assume a higher name.

If, in point of fact, penitence, or austerities, or almsgiving, could cover iniquity or propitiate the divine justice, it follows that "Christ died in vain." The primary doctrine, therefore, of revelation is—not that offending man can atone for himself, but that a full atonement is gratuitously provided through the voluntary obedience and death of the incarnate Redeemer.

When, however, persons familiarly speak of making their peace with God, it is too often apparent that they have no distinct or adequate conception of the only propitiation that has been, or will be accepted by the Almighty Judge. The ordinary phrases which are used on such occasions, are very far from conveying the idea—an idea which ought never to be forgotten—that it is solely by "being justified by faith" that we have "*peace with God*," and that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Again—it is not uncommon, when an individual is involved in great distress by his vices, to hear it said in extenuation, "I trust the Almighty will accept his sufferings as some atonement for his sins." Familiar expressions like these oftentimes indicates the general complexion of the speaker's religious sentiments; and if so, it follows as an undeniable fact, that the great characteristic and fundamental tenet of revelation has no place—no place, at least, adequate to its real importance—in the creed of a large class of modern Christians.*

* It is not intended to ground a serious charge on a mere inadvertence of expression; especially as *in a subordinate sense* such phrases as that of "making our peace with God," may be used without meaning any thing contrary to sound doctrine. But, in general, where an expression, as is the case with the present, is more likely to excite deficient, if not positively erroneous ideas, than to suggest the correct and appropriate scripture doctrine on the subject, it surely would be preferable to convey our meaning in terms more specific and less liable to mislead the mind of the hearer.

Revelation has admirably guarded the doctrine of repentance from the abuses of which at first sight it might appear susceptible. It was expedient, on the one hand, that every facility should be afforded to the returning penitent, without, on the other, the smallest encouragement being given to a continuance in sin. Natural reason could not have performed this important problem. Its requisitions must have been either too relaxed or too confined. Had those periods and circumstances been pointed out in which the transgressor should "fill up the measure of his iniquities," one man might have despaired, as being beyond the reach of mercy, while another was hardened in his crimes, as not having reached the statutable allowance.

The Almighty, therefore, on the one hand, commanded repentance to be preached to *every man*. Even the penitence of a death-bed was not rejected. But, on the other, in order that no person might steel his heart and procrastinate his repentance, the solemn warning was repeatedly added, that "whoso being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly perish, and that without a remedy." This threatening we find often exemplified; for nothing is more usual than for persons who have long revelled in vice, deferring their repentance to a more convenient opportunity, to be swept away without notice, or to be deprived on their death-bed of that intellect which they had abused while in health and strength. The Almighty, it should ever be remembered, is as much the author of true repentance as of faith; and therefore if we continue to refuse what he is mercifully pleased to promise to work in us, we cannot be surprised if at length we find that the *power* to repent is not vouchsafed, and that the heart is in consequence given up to its own hardness and machinations. The motives to immediate repentance are as strong as possible, so that no encouragement is afforded by Christianity to a systematic continuance in sin.

Neither, again, on the Christian scheme, can repentance be misapplied to the office of liquidating one debt in order that we may contract another; for the very word *repentance*, as used in the New Testament, indicates a change of disposition which renders sin as much an object of abhorrence in itself as of terror in its consequences. No man is considered as "truly repenting of his former sins," who does not, by God's grace, "steadfastly purpose to lead a new life." The two things are permanently and inseparably connected; and the absence of the latter would prove, that the former was not the genuine repentance intended to be described in the holy scriptures.

It appears, then, that on the assumption of our having violated the law even of what is called natural religion, human reason suggests no certain method of obtaining forgiveness. Natural religion was a safe code for innocent, but not for guilty man. When our first parents were created, it is quite reasonable to suppose that their Maker imprinted upon their hearts the duties and promises of what we denominate natural theology. The *peculiarities* of the Christian revelation, which are founded expressly on the supposition of sin having entered into the world, would *then* have been superfluous. Even the boasted fitness of things teaches, that man, as proceeding from the hands of his all-perfect Creator, must have been wholly free from the taint of moral evil. Elevated in the sublimity of divinely-imparted wisdom to believe in the Deity, he would doubtless infer, by simple arguments, what appeared worthy of God and of himself. His piety would be almost intuition. Every object in nature would raise his mind to the knowledge and adoration of the Creator. His will and affections being rightly affected as well as his understanding, he would in every thing act worthy of his high destinies; and every duty being adequately fulfilled, no need would be felt of a revelation of pity or forgiveness.

Such, the Christian believes, man originally was; and natural religion is necessarily founded on the same supposition, that he still remains much the same. It admits, therefore, what is undoubtedly true, that there exists a beneficent God, who delights in making his innocent creature a partaker of his own felicity; but should it be proved that mankind is no longer innocent, it is unable to suggest a suitable remedy.

The *degrees* of guilt, whether great or small, make no radical difference in the present question. If the obligations of known duty have been violated but in the smallest measure, guilt unavoidably arises; and repentance, we have already seen, has no *necessary* connexion (setting revelation aside) with forgiveness and reconciliation. There is, therefore, no rational medium in natural religion between certainty and despair; for if we are conscious of unspotted innocence, our reward is certain; and if conscious of sin, our punishment is equally sure. To a being pure and perfect as man once was, such a religion must have been an inestimable blessing; but to man in his present state, and on the assumption of sin having entered the world, it must inevitably prove the destruction of all well-founded hope.

From every consideration, then, it results that the doctrine of the atonement is the characteristic of Christianity. The gospel recognizes a new and most important principle, and treats with man as he actually exists at the present moment. It is a religion for fallen and guilty, but penitent creatures, returning to their forsaken allegiance. We have seen that in natural religion God appears simply as a supreme lawgiver, willing to confer beatitude upon an obedient and unspotted creature; but in the economy of the gospel he represents himself as a reconciled Father, delighting in mercy and forgiveness. In both dispensations, the condition was perfect and unerring obedience; and the specific character of Christianity is not that the claim to this obedience is set aside, or that a remedial law is

substituted, but that the law was magnified and made honorable by the obedience of the Son of God himself, who consented to become a piacular victim for human transgression.

Thus the problem of Socrates is divinely solved.—Every human contrivance must necessarily have introduced intestine war among the attributes of God. Either justice or mercy must have been sacrificed; for no means could have been invented by which, as in the gospel, "mercy and truth should meet together; righteousness and peace should kiss each other." But an atonement has been accepted through the medium of which, in the language of the apostle, the Almighty is "*able*" as well as willing, "to save to the uttermost," all that come to him—*able*, not in point of mere power, (for who can doubt *this* ability?) but in complete accordance with all his divine attributes and perfections.

It is not necessary to prove that such a transaction was *absolutely requisite* on the part of God, with a view to human salvation. It is enough for us, that being once revealed, it is evidently congruous to our reason and our highest conceptions of the Divine nature, which might seem, perhaps, to require that in forgiving the offences of mankind, a full exhibition should be made of the abhorrence of the Almighty to moral evil. Whether God *could*, in full consistency with all his attributes, have acted otherwise, is not for us to inquire: we are at least certain, that the mode actually chosen was eminently fitted for a display of those attributes, and was capable of producing many excellent effects of a moral kind upon those for whose benefit it was immediately intended, as well, possibly, as on other intelligences of a higher order, with whom we are at present unacquainted.

The knowledge of a Deity, the idea of futurity, and many moral duties, both to our neighbor and our God, were partly known before the revelation of the gospel; so that although Christianity has cast such heavenly

light on these and various other important subjects as would render a serious comparison between our holy religion and any other system professing to be divine as unreasonable as it is unchristian, yet a peculiar, an exclusive attribute by which the gospel is distinguished, is the fact, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." This is a doctrine which natural reason does not so much as profess to have discovered. "I am persuaded," exclaims an admirable writer already quoted,* "that for God to reconcile his inflexible justice, his exuberant mercy, and all those other attributes that seemed to clash inevitably about the designed salvation of man, and make them co-operate to it, is a stupendous manifestation of wisdom; there being no proposition in *Diophantes* or *Apollonius*, in algebra or in geometry, near so difficult to be solved, or that requires a greater number of proportions and congruities to be at once attended to, and made subservient to the same end, as that great problem propounded by God's infinite goodness to his divine wisdom,—the redemption of lost and perverse mankind upon the terms declared in the gospel; which are admirably fitted to promote, at once, God's glory and man's felicity."

Is it not then surprising, that many professed Christians, who cannot, we might suppose, be ignorant of the circumstances which made a divine revelation of gratuitous pardon necessary, should yet, in point of fact, constantly recur to the provisions of merely natural religion? Human merit has but too conspicuous a place in the system of innumerable religionists, and, unhappily, the habit of depending upon it is oftentimes in an inverse proportion to the probability of its exist-

* The Hon. Robert Boyle.—The author is glad to avail himself of such a passage, though perhaps even already, in his anxiety to point out the atonement as the very characteristic of the gospel, he has repeated the same idea more frequently than was necessary.

ence. The best men are, in religion, as in other things, the most humble; while those whose lives are the most inconsistent with the principles and spirit of the gospel, are often the very first persons to arrogate merit to themselves for their alleged observances, and, consequently, the last to feel the value of a dispensation of free unmerited forgiveness.

Let, however, a person thus disposed seriously inquire, even setting Christianity aside, whether he has lived up even to the spirit of his own defective system. Have not the duties of natural religion, as acknowledged by deists themselves, been far more than he has been accustomed to perform? One chief reason why men do not feel much wish to become interested in Christianity, in the fullest extent of the term, is, that they habitually keep out of sight the important fact of their personal guilt, and their consequent incapacity for receiving any blessing from an irreversible covenant which they have constantly infringed. For, can any person compare himself, even in his best moments, with the just standard of what he ought to be, and of what man actually was as he came from the hands of his Creator, without perceiving an awful contrast? He may not, perhaps, be the slave of vicious appetites or ungovernable passions; his conduct may, upon the whole, have been decorous and correct; but has he, in the genuine spirit of what he allows to be natural religion, gone to the full extent of loving his God supremely, and his neighbor as himself? When he reflects that the great end for which the infinitely wise and potent Sovereign of the universe bestowed upon him those exalted endowments which distinguish him from the inferior orders of the creation, was, that he might devoutly contemplate and adore the eternal Source of goodness and perfection;—that he might regard the works of nature as constant mementos of a Divinity whom he was bound to love and worship with all his heart;—that in every event of providence he

might be reminded of his duty to the Almighty Disposer of men ;—that in discharging this duty he might uniformly act, without prejudice or imperfection, in the way most pleasing to the Almighty ;—that he might be supremely anxious to learn the divine will and to perform the divine commands ;—that he might place the perfection of his nature in his Creator's approbation ;—that he might seek his happiness in fully conforming to the law under which he was created—a law which required constant love, and gratitude, and prayer, and praise to God, and to men the utmost ardors of universal charity—a law which enjoined purity and disinterestedness, justice and resignation ; in short, the complete abstinence from every vice, and the unceasing cultivation of every virtue, with an entire conquest over every frailty, and the constant aspiration after every perfection :—when a reasonable being seriously reflects that *such* were the ends for which his intellectual faculties were expressly bestowed, and feels conscious on the other hand that those faculties have been employed in a very different manner ;—that his time, his talents, his attainments, have been devoted to the world ;—that God has not been in all his thoughts ;—that the love of admiration, of pleasure, of riches, of honors, or other objects far beneath the high ends for which man was designed, have been suffered to rival his Creator in his affections ;—that the delightful communion with the Supreme Being in prayer and meditation, and praise, which natural religion suggests in common with revealed, has been greatly neglected, or at best but remissly followed ;—and that even when his conduct has not been overtly sinful, it has been virtually so by a decided and systematic preference for those things which ought to be but secondary and subordinate in human esteem :—when a person thus candidly examines his heart and conduct by the acknowledged and immutable laws of his creation, he cannot surely but confess that he is an offender against

God, and is justly obnoxious to the divine displeasure. It then becomes no uninteresting information, that Christianity is a system of gratuitous mercy, rising infinitely beyond the provisions of natural religion, in the substitution of an atonement and the appointment of an Intercessor.

It appears then that the plea of our sins not having been multiplied or great,—even were such a plea valid in itself,—is one which we could not possibly urge. Setting aside individual offences, is it no fault to have lived habitually inattentive to the supreme ends of our being? By nature, as our nature has become by the fall, our general system, and pursuits, and predilections are fundamentally wrong; and our very insensibility to our moral condition proves at once the blindness of our understanding and the hardness of our hearts. Were we duly to practise self-examination, which is an obligation essential in Christianity, and perfectly consistent with the regulations of natural religion, we could not fail to perceive the great necessity that exists for a covenant of free and unmerited grace.

The preceding course of argument has been grounded on the supposition that a large class of professed Christians are in reality, though perhaps unconsciously, trusting to the mere principles of natural religion, and not to the method of salvation revealed exclusively in the gospel, for their pardon and acceptance with God. That this supposition, however grievous, is not unfounded, is too evidently true; for every hope of eternal happiness that is not immediately derived from the merits and sufferings of the Redeemer, is undeniably a recurrence to the natural covenant of works. Yet how common is it to hear an amiable deportment, a benevolent heart, or any other moral grace that happens to be most conspicuous in a given character, spoken of as a sort of tacit claim to the kingdom of heaven. If the life of an individual have been free from the grosser violations of rectitude, the majority of

nominal Christians immediately infer the safety of his eternal state, without any distinct or immediate reference to that free redemption which is exhibited in the gospel as the only refuge for fallen man.

Amongst those, however, who do not *wholly* merge Christianity in the religion of nature, it is not unusual to perceive an attempt to blend the two discordant systems. The professors of this unscriptural coalition rely partly upon their own merits, and partly upon those of the Redeemer—in direct opposition to the constant warnings of the apostle respecting the fruitless attempt to unite the law of nature and the law of grace, for the purposes of human justification.

The origin of this too common doctrine may be easily traced. There is a large class of persons, who have no wish to yield themselves wholly to the self-denying conditions of the religion of Jesus Christ, and yet are unwilling to lose the blessings connected with these conditions. They contrive therefore to reject almost the whole of Christianity except its promises, while they live a life which even many deistical advocates for natural religion would condemn. Where human reason is less explicit in suggesting a duty than the volume of revelation, they affect to believe that they cannot greatly err under the guidance of the former; but where a blessing or an immunity is in question, they zealously profess their attachment for the latter. They resemble a servant who should attempt to stipulate to receive his remuneration from one master, while he employed his whole time and abilities in the service of another. On earth they often act like unbelievers, yet they confidently hope to arrive at the heaven appointed solely for the genuine disciples of the Redeemer.

Even those who do not thus systematically amalgamate natural religion with revealed, often adopt the same fallacious system, from culpable ignorance and inattention. Yet what can be more plain than the dis-

tinction between these two economies? God has given two covenants to man; that of nature, and that of revelation; that of works, and that of grace. The rewards of each are eternal happiness; the penalties of each eternal misery. The covenant of works we have broken, and even our best obedience is infinitely imperfect, so that by it our doom is sealed without any reasonable hopes of deliverance. The covenant of grace, on the contrary, has provided a Mediator, an Advocate, a Surety; and thus its blessings are permanently secured, if only we become interested in its stipulations. How great then must be the depravity of our understanding as well as of our will, if we should fail to make a right choice, when life and death are thus plainly set before us.

Men would be more anxious than they are to seek the blessings of the gospel, if they had not a sinful aversion to its commands. Penitence, self-renunciation, and dependence for salvation wholly on the vicarious merits of a Redeemer, are to the natural heart humiliating duties. A life of holiness also appears to an unrenewed mind to be but another name for a life of mortification and misery. It was, however, a most wise provision for the interest of human morals, that none can be a true disciple of Christ, whose heart has not been filled with penitential sorrow for sin. Whatever may be the imaginations of the enemies of religion, no genuine Christian ever derived from the freedom of the blessings of the gospel that unworthy inference, "let us sin, that grace may abound."

The precise ends for which the Christian revelation was added to the light of nature, can be ascertained only in the sacred writings. Saint Paul has most concisely, but beautifully, unfolded them in his admirable speech to king Agrippa. Having described his "manner of life from his youth," and his zeal for the extirpation of the rising church of Christ, he proceeds to narrate his miraculous conversion, and the words in

which the glorified Messiah addressed him on that memorable occasion. After a promise of support and protection amidst the dangers which he must unavoidably encounter in his mission to the Gentiles, his heavenly Instructer proceeded to explain to him the specific objects which the gospel was intended to embrace. The apostle was about to preach Christianity in countries, many of which were already enlightened by great learning and civilization, in which the boasted reason of man was almost deified and adored. He was not therefore suffered to make his appearance among those proud philosophical inquirers without being provided with a complete answer to the question, "Wherefore art thou come?" Fully satisfied with the dim light of nature, the inhabitants of Greece and Rome would expect a very explicit detail of his intentions in proclaiming a divine revelation. He was therefore expressly taught the exact objects of his mission; namely, "*to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus.*"

Such then are the defined objects of revelation.—Concise as is the specification, it contains an admirable epitome of the whole of the New Testament, as indeed it could not fail to do, when we consider that it came from its divine Author, who must necessarily be well acquainted with the intention of his own system. In carefully following such a clue, we can scarcely wander; and perhaps a few pages cannot be employed more usefully or appropriately than in an endeavor to unfold the full import and extent of these concise expressions.

The preliminary design, then, of the gospel is, to *open men's eyes*. The inspired writers uniformly proceed upon the supposition that the human understanding is darkened by sin. Man, with all his vaunted

dignity, is evidently but a ruin. A few venerable fragments of a once stately edifice are all that now remain. The will, the judgment, the affections, have lost their original aptitudes and proportions; so that the whole moral structure needs to be rebuilt, before it can again become what it was intended to be, a temple for the Almighty Sovereign of the universe.

For the sake of argument it has been conceded, that some of the fundamental principles of religion *might* possibly have been discovered by the legitimate use of the natural understanding; and Saint Paul himself on this very ground attests, that the Gentiles were without excuse in their idolatries and vices. Yet so great is the usual inattention of men to the subject of religion, that none but a few philosophical individuals of Greece and Rome seemed to think that they had any interest in theological inquiries. Grovelling in the affairs of the world, the great body of mankind could never, of their own accord, reflect upon their spiritual interests. There was therefore an obvious necessity for persons to be delegated, like Saint Paul, by the Almighty himself, to counteract this natural indifference by inculcating the essential principles of knowledge and of duty.

Inattention was not, however, the only cause of that moral blindness which Christianity was intended to remove. Voluntary prejudice and false philosophy greatly corrupted the understanding of even the more intelligent heathens, and there is therefore little cause to wonder at the fact that persons of the lower classes of intellect were entirely depraved. A man who should have completely discovered all those truths which modern deists affect to consider as included in natural religion, and who should have attempted to exemplify their efficacy in his life, must have been constrained to break through most of the prejudices and maxims of his country and his education. It may therefore be inferred what a powerful effect such preju-

dices and maxims must have habitually exerted in darkening the mind of heathen communities. Even those persons who had succeeded in conquering their natural listlessness and repugnance to moral and theological discussion, were still in great danger of being seduced into error by the force of established and unsuspected habits and opinions. If to this we add the constant prevalence of vicious propensities which cloud the reason, and produce a moral inability to serious investigation, remembering also that men thus inclined to vice would feel an interest in preferring voluntary darkness to the knowledge of those truths which could serve only to alarm their conscience and render them uneasy in their irreligious course, we cannot wonder that there should have existed an imperative necessity for that merciful office which the apostle was commissioned to perform.

We may appeal to facts. Were not even the Greeks and Romans wholly ignorant respecting what deists themselves consider to be some essential points of religion? Did not many of their greatest philosophers quit the simplicity even of natural reason, and involve themselves in the greatest absurdities of error? It is to little purpose to infer that they *might* have been better informed by a due exertion of their powers, if, as appears in their writings, they were not so in point of fact; for, in either case, it was equally necessary to "open their eyes" in reference to the important subjects respecting which they were either ignorant or inattentive.

Not, however, to strain the argument to its fullest extent, let it be conceded that some few moralists and philosophers had obtained considerable information concerning the nature of God, and the consequent duties of man; yet do we find that the light which had been thus partially enkindled in the schools had extended, or was likely to extend, its rays to the majority of the people? Far from it;—universal igno-

rance and irreligion were not to be conquered by the feeble arm of a few philosophical individuals.

Retrace in imagination the long succession of ages antecedent to the Christian era, and enumerate as they pass in review the most enlightened moralists who appear to have existed in the course of every thousand years. Or, to abbreviate this labor, select Greece and Rome as favorable specimens, and confine the research to these alone. How mortifying to human intellect the gloomy retrospect! Take away from Greece her Socrates, her Plato, and her Aristotle; and from Rome her Cicero, her imported Epictetus, her Antoninus, her Seneca, and a few others, and try, if possible, to supply the defect from the remaining hosts of philosophers. How vain the attempt! A few remarkable men, who were not specimens but exceptions, cannot disprove the necessity that existed for the illuminating rays of the gospel even in a moral point of view. In general, the very schools of philosophy were darkened both by ignorance and vice, and with regard to the body of the people, the greatest moralists gave them over in despair.

To affirm that the knowledge and virtuous principles which were inculcated by the above-mentioned individuals, and a few others who imbibed their spirit, produced any visible effects on the mass of their contemporaries or successors, would be a flagrant exaggeration. In contempt of philosophical remonstrance, we find that idolatry, and its attendant immoralities, remained almost universal. Even the teachers themselves often yielded to the absurd practices of their disciples; whilst the latter, contented with the superiority of being initiated into a few moral speculations which distinguished them from their unthinking neighbors, were wholly inattentive to the practical effects which ought to have followed from their admitted principles. Vain glory and the love of disputation were

almost the only results that attended upon their boasted acquaintance with natural religion.

Considerable, however, as might be the moral information which certain philosophers had found means to obtain, it was far from being either so pure or so complete as to preclude the necessity for a divine revelation. Even admitting, what cannot be proved, that their system was both beneficial and self-derived, still their most lucid speculations, when compared with the light of Christianity, were but "darkness visible." A mere rustic, who has been taught the elements of the Christian catechism, is infinitely better informed in religion than Socrates himself. The most virtuous heathens deplored their own ignorance, and were anxious for divine communications of light and information. Even natural religion, as recognized by deists who have written since the establishment of Christianity, admits several doctrines and inculcates various precepts with which the most illustrious heathens were unacquainted. The more minutely, therefore, the gospel is examined, the more will its necessity be discovered, and its excellence be appreciated. In it the scattered hints of natural religion are collected and enlarged; what was partly known is rendered more clear, and what was doubtful or confused is lucidly displayed.

But the paramount glory of Christianity is not that it improves, but that it reveals; not that it exhibits important incidental communications, but that its whole nature and design are important. It has been already seen that the most essential point, and that which chiefly required a divine revelation, was the discovery of a method in which the Almighty would see fit to pardon sin. This fundamental circumstance could not in the nature of things be discovered by unassisted reason; for God only could know how God would act. The apostle was therefore sent to the Gentiles to "open their eyes" upon this most important sub-

ject, and to show them that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ should all be made alive." He preached the doctrine of pardon and reconciliation by the death and merits of the incarnate Redeemer;—a method of salvation which, as we have already seen, human reason could never have discovered, but which, being once revealed, appears evidently congruous to the nature both of God and man.

But the doctrine of the Atonement was not an insulated topic. It was necessary that men should be taught those facts which made an atonement requisite, and that they should ascertain more of themselves and of their Creator than the mere light of nature could unfold. Revelation therefore includes an extended range of topics, all of which are however more or less remotely applicable to that supremely interesting subject, the pardon of sin and the ultimate happiness of the human race.

To this end, the chief points upon which the apostle was commissioned to "open the eyes of the Gentiles" were the true nature of God, and several important facts relating to mankind.

To begin with the being and attributes of God, the information conveyed by Christianity, as distinct from what is called natural religion, is unspeakably important. The heathens possessed, at best, but a few indistinct notices of the Divinity. Their perceptions were neither vivid nor correct. The *unity* of the divine nature, though allowedly capable of being deduced from the principles of right reason, was scarcely admitted by their greatest philosophers; most, if not all, of whom habitually spoke of the Deity in the plural number, and thus sanctioned by their example the gross absurdities of polytheism.

If, as we all allow, there is a God, must he not be justly offended at being made but one amongst various objects of adoration? Can we conceive of any error more derogatory to the great Author of all things,

than that polytheistical system which prevailed amongst the nations of classical antiquity, and which contradicted, what Deists themselves allow to be a fundamental principle of human reason, that there could not have been *two* independent First Causes? The whole system of nature and providence evidently possesses far more symmetry and consistence than could have resulted from the operation of two or more distinct and independent Intelligences.

But even supposing that the heathen world had fully acknowledged the unity of God, and therefore needed no further illumination upon this part of the subject, yet the doctrine of a TRIUNE SUBSISTENCE in the divine nature, was what no natural intellect could ever have discovered. But revelation being admitted as true, (and it has been before observed that it is not the object of these pages to prove it, but to argue upon its admission,) it appears that the knowledge of this doctrine was of essential importance. If, as orthodox Christians believe, the method of pardoning sin which God saw fit to propose was founded upon this very fact, how could natural religion be esteemed a sufficient guide, seeing it could never have suggested so mysterious though important a truth? The doctrine of the Trinity was no vague dogma, no inoperative speculation. It was a tenet without a knowledge of which the question of Socrates could never have been answered. We could not indeed have established the point in question *à priori*, but, admitting Christianity to be a revelation from God, it becomes indisputable; for is not the whole gospel a scheme of pardon founded upon the fact that there is a triune personality in the Godhead, to which the offices of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier were attached? and if such be the fact, how could men be taught the mode of reconciliation to God, without having their eyes previously opened to that mysterious peculiarity of his nature upon which he thought fit to ground the revealed mode of pacification?

The importance of the doctrine of the Trinity is, perhaps, sometimes overlooked by professed Christians, owing to the associations of thought which are often connected with it. The very term which has been introduced to express this divine relation, being an extra-scriptural word, involuntarily calls to our minds the pages of human controversy, rather than the hallowed and *practical* instructions of scripture truth. Many persons, perhaps, have scarcely heard of the doctrine but in a polemical way. The pulpit discourses, for example, which are delivered at that great festival which is most peculiarly set apart for our meditation upon the holy and undivided Trinity in Unity, are sometimes such as would be considered inappropriate to any other occasion; being so critical and controversial that no lesson for practice can be derived from them, except, indeed, the important one of reverence and awe at the contemplation of the mysteries of the Godhead. A person, therefore, whose views of this doctrine have been formed solely by such occasional discourses, cannot enter into its real importance and practical effects. He will feel as if he could almost do without this doctrine in his religious system, considering it rather as an insulated topic, and appropriate chiefly to particular occasions, than as the legitimate and necessary foundation for every Christian argument and discourse.

When therefore it is contended that the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity was the first great point upon which the apostles were commissioned to open the eyes of the Gentiles, it is far from being intended that they formally discussed the subject in the terms of human art, or spoke with the minuteness of those creeds which the heresies of succeeding times rendered necessary. It will scarcely be supposed that Saint Paul ever preached what would be strictly called a Trinity Sunday sermon.

The plain fact is, that the doctrine under discussion

is not merely an awful mystery, but a subject of essential practical utility, and without which no other doctrine of revelation can be satisfactorily explained. We are baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," not merely for the sake of confessing ourselves to be Trinitarians, but that we may become practically acquainted with the actual blessings which flow from a spiritual union with the three Divine Persons. *Every* sermon therefore ought to be constructed on the principle of God being the Father, the Divine Son the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit the Comforter, of the sincere believer. It was in this method that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by the apostles. Had Saint Paul entered the philosophical assemblies of Greece, and disputed on the triune nature of the Deity in the mere language of barren metaphysics, he would probably have excited great admiration by his learning, and perhaps have founded a school of disciples; but in so doing he would have misapplied his knowledge to a very meagre and unsatisfactory purpose.

But Saint Paul was far from acting thus: he preached the doctrine not systematically but practically; not as what was to be speculatively discussed as a mere abstract fact, but as what was necessary for an infinitely important end. This end was the salvation of the human race. The greatest of all problems was to be solved, and it was incidental to its solution that the triune existence of the one Jehovah should be known and believed. The apostles therefore preached the doctrine specifically in reference to the redemption of mankind; not as a philosophical discussion, but as a practical truth. They constantly exhibited the offices which the three Divine Persons in the one Eternal Essence were pleased to bear in the covenant of grace. It was impossible, therefore, to embrace the gospel, as taught by the apostles, without being clear upon this important point of faith. The young-

est convert could answer that God the Father made him, that when he had fallen Christ died to redeem him, and that he was to look to the Holy Spirit for grace to help and sanctify him in his new and arduous course to the regions of eternal joy.

Not only, however, did men, with all the boasted light of natural religion, require to have their eyes opened to perceive the unity and the mode of subsistence in the Godhead, but they needed information also respecting those attributes and perfections which, even if they were imperfectly guessed at by natural reason, could never be truly ascertained without an express revelation. Men were unable to discover that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," or even those attributes of the Deity upon which this important doctrine is founded. The gospel therefore not only revealed what had been entirely hid, but clearly displayed what was uncertain and obscure. The wisdom and power of the Divinity were indeed already visible in the works of nature; but how much more conspicuously were they unfolded in the economy of human redemption! The justice of God was here eminently displayed in the voluntary sufferings of the self-devoted Victim, while his love and his mercy triumphed in the gratuitous restoration of an offending race. Even had *every* attribute and perfection of God been fully discoverable by natural reason, the method of pardoning sin would have still remained a secret; for, in fact, the more the divine nature is considered, the greater the difficulty appears. It is ignorance only or presumption that will undertake to assert that God was *obliged* by his attributes to pardon mankind upon their repentance and amendment.

Another essential point upon which the Christian dispensation was intended to open the eyes of the world, is *the nature and end of man.* The ignorance of the wisest heathens upon this most interesting topic

must appear quite astonishing to the advocates of natural religion. It might have been thought impossible that men should fail seriously to inquire into the nature of those objects for which they were placed in the present world. Were a person to be carried during sleep into a distant country where every thing was new and surprising, his first inquiry would be, "In what manner arrived I here, and for what end am I placed in such a situation?" The same question applies morally to all mankind; especially as it is quite incredible that a being so highly endowed as man should have been placed upon earth for merely the worthless purposes to which we see human life usually devoted. Yet obvious as is this idea, how few have habitually made it a subject of adequate consideration!

But revealed religion clears this momentous topic from those difficulties with which the religion of nature was obliged to leave it enveloped. It shows man exactly what he originally was, what he at present is, and what in future he may expect to be. Without this essential knowledge it is impossible that we should ascertain either our duties or our privileges. The sacred writings therefore were intended to put us in full possession of every leading principle and fact relating to the subject, and thus to furnish a complete guide for our present conduct, and an unerring standard for regulating our future expectations.

Man then, it appears from the inspired volume, was created for the most exalted ends. Beaming with the reflected rays of the Divinity in whose image he was formed, he was placed in a world of order and beatitude, where his bounden duty and his highest happiness were to study and perform the will of his Creator. His soul, the higher part of his nature, was fitted for the most ecstatic intercourse with its Maker. It was an intellectual being, perfect, innocent, and completely blessed, and was united to a body, of human lineaments indeed, but of a symmetry doubtless the most

perfect, and adequately prepared for the reception of so exalted a guest. This immortal volatile intelligence was constituted by its very nature for endless duration, being uncompounded and consequently indiscerptible; and there seems every reason to conclude that its enjoyment would have been everlastingly increasing, since it must have been every moment receiving the additional reward of its obedience, and might therefore approximate forever to the felicity of the Supreme himself, to which, however, no finite being can ever fully arrive.

Man thus innocent and happy, was penetrated with love for his Creator, the source of loveliness itself. The world also, which was appointed for his habitation, was commensurate with his desires. Every thing that was created was "very good;" and he himself, besides being fully capable of perceiving all the excellencies, and enjoying all the delights, with which he was surrounded, had the great additional satisfaction of viewing every thing as the bounty of his Almighty Friend. Love, gratitude, adoration, every disposition that can elevate or beatify the purest soul, was constantly present in his bosom, giving the highest zest even to his secondary enjoyments. "My Father made them all!"

The fact of man's original bliss was indeed partly known to the heathens themselves, through the universal prevalence of early tradition; but an express revelation alone could assure the world of the great design for which we were created, namely, to live to the praise and glory of our omnipotent Creator. To labor in the world for a few years, to take daily care for the repose and refection of our mortal frame, and to leave a race of successors to tread in our steps, could not rationally have been considered as the highest objects for which we were endowed with such dignified powers and capacities; yet these objects, subordinate as they confessedly appear,—not only to the enlight-

ened Christian, but to modern deists themselves, who have indirectly acquired more certain information from the gospel,—were all that the generality of the heathens professed to understand. The main-spring of morality was thus wanting; for if man was ignorant that the grand design of his being was, that he should approximate in his probationary state as far as possible towards the perfections of his Creator, the whole merit or demerit of his actions was necessarily obliged to be regulated by some less appropriate and exalted standard.

That image in which revelation teaches us that man was originally created, he was required to preserve by unerring holiness and obedience. The task was easy and delightful; for his Creator every moment preserved his powers of body and of mind, and enabled him to direct them to their destined end. Before transgression and its attendant miseries could be introduced, there must inevitably arise a voluntary defection of the human will. This will had hitherto been perfect and unpolluted, nor could any blame be attached to the infinite Source of wisdom and beneficence, if ever it should become otherwise. Man was formed expressly to "delight himself in God," and had *power* so to do as long as his *will* was unimpaired. Perfectly conversant with all visible creation, observing with admiration and delight the innumerable beauties and congruities of the material world, he ascended to the uncreated Source of all things, delighting in God as his Maker, his Preserver, his Benefactor, and conversing with those celestial intelligences whose supreme aim, like his own, was to gain a more intimate acquaintance and communion with the common Lord of all.

The intention of revelation being at once to convince us of our present state of degradation, and to exhibit the means of restoring us to the original purity and happiness of our nature, it was requisite that the preceding facts should be known, in order that we might

perceive the extent of the disease, and duly appreciate the remedy which has been discovered. Christianity, whilst by its provision of a vicarious obedience, and its offers of supernatural assistance, it seems evidently to regard us as weak and fallen creatures, was far from being intended to leave us ultimately such. It reveals pardon to sinners; but its final end is that they shall be sinners no longer; so that its energy and operation are never to cease, till the subject of them arrives at that world where he shall find himself restored to all, and more than all, the aboriginal perfections as well as delights of his nature.

No heathen philosopher could possibly be quite blind to the existence of moral evil, though he might fail to perceive it in its full extent, and might be unconscious of the method of its original introduction. Yet, on the other hand, it is equally impossible to contemplate the character of the Deity without deriving the natural conclusion that "God made man upright;"—but to reconcile the apparent discrepancy which arises from these two equally undeniable facts, was far beyond the intelligence of natural religion. It was, however, highly important that we should obtain correct information on the subject, were it only to justify the conduct of our Creator, whose wisdom and holiness would be impeached by the supposition that man was originally made such as he *now* appears to exist.

But how clearly is the whole subject unfolded in the simple narrative of Holy Writ! We there learn the important fact that the first parents of mankind were created such as has been described, but that their state was probationary, and their future happiness or misery at their own disposal. The general condition of the covenant formed between God and man was obedience to the divine commands. This obedience was voluntarily infringed by our forefather's plucking the fruit of the "forbidden tree;" and the simple, easy nature of the command, far from justify-

ing the offence, only rendered him less excusable in his transgression. Had the test been made more severe, we might have presumptuously ventured to blame our Maker for his conduct; but if so trifling a temptation was sufficient to induce man to violate his allegiance, we have no reason to believe that he would have stood firm under any other dispensation. The spirit and letter of the covenant were as much infringed by the breach of this apparently ceremonial command, as they would have been by the most flagrant and acknowledged immorality; nay, even *more* so, for in proportion as the prohibition may be thought unimportant in itself, the act of disobedience argues greater practical contempt for the authority of the legislator.

It was the object, therefore, of revelation to "open the eyes" of men to their present fallen and unhappy condition; a condition not originally forced on man against his will, but superinduced by voluntary transgression, and since awfully evidenced by the accumulated sins of six thousand years. We learn from revelation, what experience but too fully proves, that mankind has become radically depraved; that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all, for that all have sinned." The literal meaning of this curse, namely, in its application to *natural* death, is obvious to all. But in a moral and spiritual view also it is no less true. That divine intercourse with God for which we were originally formed, and in the desire after which consisted the very life of the soul, is by nature now unknown. Our perceptions and our hearts are evidently debased. Every thing must convince us, if we would only open our eyes to obvious though unwelcome facts, that we need the vivifying influences of that celestial Spirit who first breathed into us the breath of natural life, to invigorate the torpid powers of the soul, and to raise them to their original object of admiration and desire.

It is for want of being thus fully "convinced of sin,"

that the majority of professed Christians feel so little need of the merciful provisions of the economy of grace and salvation. They do not, indeed, deny the general fact of human depravity ; but they fail to enter into it with that minuteness of detail, and that constant individual application, which alone can impress upon the mind the full necessity for the gospel dispensation.

The next leading fact respecting which revelation has opened the eyes of men, is the immortality of the human soul. This tenet is evidently essential to our well-being, since it necessarily leads us to the highly momentous doctrine of human life being a state of probation, and futurity a state of rewards and punishments. Here, in fact, is the strongest foundation for all hope and all morality ; and this being done away, all pleasurable anticipation vanishes, and not less the sanctions for virtue and correctness of life. Without a knowledge of this point, vice might too often appear the truest policy, so long at least as it remained confined within those sober limits which would neither injure the corporeal frame, nor destroy our character and estimation in the world.

Accustomed from our childhood in a Christian country to hear of this important doctrine of man's immortality, we can scarcely enter fully into the feelings of nations uninstructed upon the subject. The wisest heathens, however, though they did not wholly disbelieve, felt considerable doubts; and a strong *hope* was the utmost that a Socrates, a Plato, or a Cicero could obtain. The very Athenians, enlightened as they were, mocked, we are told, when the apostle, in compliance with his instructions, began to " open their eyes" in reference to their own future existence. They had no conception that the body which mouldered in the grave, or was consumed on the funeral pile, could be reintegrated and made heir to eternal duration. At best, their notices of immortality were too feeble and indistinct to conquer the seductions of

the present world, and to make them live worthy of their primeval destination.

The alleged physical difficulties which have been sometimes urged upon the subject of the resurrection can have no effect upon the man who believes that God can do every thing that is not morally wrong, or that involves a positive contradiction, of which latter point especially he is himself the only infallible judge. The absurdity of the most ignorant Hottentot's attempting to define how far the powers of a Newton might extend, would be literally nothing to that of professing to point out what is possible or impossible with God. If the evidences for the divinity and inspiration of the sacred scriptures be admitted as complete and satisfactory, (and this is the hypothesis on which the remarks in this Essay are avowedly constructed,) a difficulty in the execution of a project must not be allowed to affect the principles themselves. If God can do what the scriptures state him to have already performed, by fair comparison, there is no physical difficulty in the future resurrection which he cannot also overcome.

But, in reality, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, instead of creating, obviates difficulties; since with it the whole of human life is a clear and intelligible plan, and without it, an inextricable labyrinth of doubts and incongruities. For what is the entire scheme of providence and the moral government of God, but an enigma, the solution of which depends almost entirely upon the doctrine under consideration? To survey the events of the present world, without acknowledging a futurity, must almost necessarily lead to the absurdities of atheism; for how shall we reconcile the existence of a wise, potent, and equitable moral Governor, with the actual and acknowledged circumstances of mankind? Why do wars desolate the world? Why are conquerors and usurpers permitted to deform the fair face of nature and of nations?

Or, to turn from this large scale of events to individuals, why are the wicked so often in prosperity and the righteous in adversity? Why is an infant, beautiful and engaging, torn from the fond breast of an amiable mother, around whose heart it had entwined itself with its innocent caresses, while, perhaps, a rebellious and ungrateful child remains to bring its parent's hoary hairs with sorrow to the grave? Why in the Christian church are heresies and persecutions permitted to exist? Why are not hypocrites unmasked, and the faithful rewarded according to their desert? The obvious and the only answer to these and similar interrogations is, the acknowledgment of the doctrine under consideration, with a reliance on the truth of that inspired assertion, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know *hereafter*."

In some cases it must be allowed that the most inscrutable events of Providence are so fully explained by subsequent occurrences, even in the present life, that, setting aside the idea of a future existence, the equity of God is fully vindicated. How often do circumstances the most dark and mysterious, and apparently the most unkind, ultimately produce the very effect which we most desired! Our tenderest connexions may, perhaps, have been broken, our warmest hopes disappointed, our dearest wishes blighted, and all our happiness we thought irrecoverably fled; but the revolution of a few days or years has possibly convinced us that our murmurs were unjust, and that even these things tended towards our final good.—Even events that seem for the moment almost to authorize the conclusion, that the world is governed by chance, and that Providence is a fable, oftentimes in the end most forcibly prove that "verily there is a God who reigneth in the earth, and governeth the hearts of the children of men."

Hear the broken-hearted patriarch exclaim, "Ye have bereaved me of my children; Joseph is not, and

Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin also; all these things are against me." "My son shall not go down." But how soon was he constrained to dry his tears and hush his murmurs! Follow him to Egypt, and observe his altered language:—"Joseph, my son, is yet alive!" How wise, as well as wonderful, must the designs of Divine Providence have appeared in the eyes of this enlightened patriarch! Severe as had been his affliction, it was surely greatly overbalanced by the joy of finding that his long-lost son had been the unexpected instrument, not only of preserving from famine the populous kingdom of Egypt, but of communicating the same blessing to various other nations, including his own unnatural brethren, by whom he had been sold to slavery. The whole maze of Providence was thus gradually unravelled, till at length the astonished Israel, melting into gratitude to God for the beneficial results of his apparently adverse dispensations, was obliged to acknowledge at once his wisdom and his love. He kissed, we are told, the children of Joseph, who were presented to him in his old age, and, embracing them, said to their father, who was standing beside his dying pillow, "I had not thought to see *thy* face, and lo! God hath showed me also thy seed!"

Instances of this kind might be produced in abundance from the volume of revelation; and being really facts that occurred in history, they are quite applicable to the present discussion. But even adverting from that holy book, which is the only authentic guide to the mysteries of Providence, and referring to the common historical events of nations and individuals, and especially to the extraordinary scenes which the present generation has had occasion to witness, may we not oftentimes perceive such traces of the divine superintendence as ought to convince us of the certainty of the doctrine in question? But in the majority of cases the existence of a future state is the true index,

without which the whole plan must be unintelligible. The Almighty, in his wisdom, discovers his hand sufficiently to show that the world is not governed by chance, yet not so fully and so often as to furnish even a plausible argument against the necessity of future retribution.

To the heathen world the events of Providence must have proved an inextricable labyrinth; but revelation has furnished a clue to all their windings. Is man, for example, evidently "born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards?" He is; and from the circumstance a pagan might deduce an inference to the dishonor of his Creator; but the scripture clears up the difficulty, by informing us that God made man completely happy, but that he drew misery upon himself by his own voluntary transgression. The simple narrative of the fall of man has elucidated a point which mere philosophy could never have made known. It is true that when we come to speculate seriously upon the introduction of moral evil, the *ultimate* question still remains, "Why did not God prevent what he must have necessarily foreseen?"—and to this question no satisfactory answer can be given upon any system whatever, with which mankind is acquainted. The mysterious subject lies evidently far beyond the limits of human sagacity. Perhaps it was not revealed because the Almighty knew that to our finite capacities, in their present state, the solution would be incomprehensible; or, because even if understood, it would have conveyed no practical lesson to mankind. When it can be proved that the full understanding of this awful subject is essential to our well-being, then, and not till then, we may venture, perhaps, to hope that it will be made a matter of immediate revelation. In the mean time, we are fully apprized of the whole transaction of the fall, as far as it related to ourselves, and may therefore be well content for futurity to explain those secret things which belong exclusively to God.

Upon the whole, however, it may be remarked for the purpose of "vindicating the ways of God to man," that from the permission of moral evil the great Disposer of events has educed incalculable good, having made his own attributes and glory to appear with a lustre which they might never otherwise have exhibited. His mercy, his long-suffering, his wisdom, and even his justice, were unspeakably magnified by the stupendous method which he saw fit to employ for the salvation of mankind.

Revelation not only recognizes the idea of our immortality, but embodies it in its various instructions and observances. The very doctrine of redemption itself, the grand fundamental article of revealed religion, seems to stamp such a value on the human soul as could never have been considered appropriate had it not been eternal and imperishable. To have spent so costly a sacrifice for the preservation of a frail and temporary existence would not have corresponded with our ideas of divine wisdom. Again—in order to strengthen our faith in this doctrine, we have actual instances recorded in scripture of miraculous resuscitation, under such circumstances as render fraud or collusion impossible ; and especially in the case of our Saviour himself, who rose from the dead the third day, and "became the first fruits of them that slept." As the first fruits are a specimen and a pledge of the whole harvest, so the resurrection of the Redeemer confirms us in the full hope and expectation of our own revival. He predicted that he would rise again to prepare eternal mansions of happiness for his disciples, that where he was they might be also ; and having verified the former part of his assertion, namely, his own resurrection, he has given an adequate pledge for the completion also of the remainder of the promise.

The immortality of the human soul was therefore a principal subject upon which the apostles were to open

the eyes of their fellow-creatures. They were to teach them that "the fashion of this world passeth away," and were to incite them to prepare for a far higher state of eternal existence. They represented the present life but as a scene of education for futurity. How dignified, how noble, does human existence appear when viewed in this interesting aspect! How lowly soever in itself, it instantly derives an exalted character and color from the consideration of its ulterior design. Connected, as it is, with the celestial world, it cannot be unimportant. Were the present state *all* that we are to expect, there would be little in life for which it is worth having been born. But how is the whole path of human existence illumined when beheld by the light of this celestial truth! Its darkest shades disappear. Affliction itself becomes a blessing, when viewed as a merciful preparative for everlasting bliss. The mourner is taught to rejoice with "joy unspeakable and full of glory," while he counterpoises his "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," with that "exceeding weight of glory" which is "eternal."

Again—in connexion with this doctrine the moral government of God begins to appear consistent with itself. Where is the envied prosperity of the wicked, and the consequent discouragement to the righteous, when the life of each is taken in connexion with his death, and with the eternal retribution that must assuredly succeed? Or what cause is there for despair amidst the short-lived troubles of life, to the man who expects ere long to be a glorified spirit before the eternal throne? The present scene, dark as it may be, will not last forever. The sun will rise, the clouds will break away, and the full propriety of every event become irresistibly apparent. A single moment will solve all the doubts, and rectify all the misconceptions of the present world. Wickedness shall weep over its own success, while the tears of piety shall be

forever wiped away. Virtue and vice, sin and holiness, shall meet their due reward. The decision shall be so public as fully to vindicate the ways of Providence, and each individual shall feel the decision perfectly agreeable to the dictates of his now awakened conscience.

The most impressive aspect in which eternity can be viewed is this of a state of rewards and punishments "according to the deeds done in the body;" for if we are to be thus judged, how important is the knowledge of the fact, in order that we may be prepared for the tribunal at which we are shortly to appear!

Natural religion, therefore, in order to be fully adequate to the case of man, should explicitly teach him that his soul is immortal, that he shall be judged for his actions, and that eternal happiness or eternal misery shall be his award. But on every one of these points this boasted system fails; not so much indeed by not partially *intimating* the truth, as by not presenting it with prominence and clearness. Its brightest light is but an obscure glimmering. To the man who should arrive at the above-mentioned truths without the express aid of the gospel, they will never appear with that vividness which is necessary to give them their practical effect. He would be ready to say, amidst his speculations, "If I were *assured* of what I confess appears very probable, I would act upon the information; but why give up present and substantial enjoyment for a prospect which, after all my conclusions, *may* be but an illusion?"

But Christianity impresses these truths upon the mind in a manner the most urgent. They are repeated and enforced. They are taught in various forms, and accommodated to every capacity. The whole system of revelation is expressly founded upon the supposition of a future state. We have a complete copy of the charge to be exhibited against us, and

of the expected sentence of our omniscient Judge. There is no seductive ambiguity to lull us to a fatal repose. The punishment and the reward are exhibited in the plainest colors; so that no possible excuse is left to the impenitent offender, while every cheering prospect, every encouraging motive, is presented to him who is anxious to return to his violated allegiance.

Revelation also infinitely transcends what is styled natural religion in another point intimately connected with the doctrine under discussion; namely, that while it clearly exhibits the eternal punishment and reward, it fully explains also how the one may be avoided and the other obtained;—a subject upon which human reason, as has been already seen, leaves its admirer in the greatest perplexity and doubt. The gospel alone could inform us that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

In immediate connexion with the doctrine of a Mediator, to which this last passage of scripture refers, may be mentioned the method of approaching God in the act of worship; a subject of acknowledged practical importance, but one upon which the religion of nature could afford no certain information. If there be a God, as we all allow, even unassisted reason might suggest the propriety both of internal and external homage. But if man by his offences have alienated himself from his Creator, in what way may he approach him with acceptance? That the idea of a Mediator as an answer to this question is not inconsistent with natural reason, may be inferred not only from the usual practice of men in their own affairs, but from the mythology of the heathens themselves, who often represent their inferior deities as interceding with the Supreme.

The more completely man feels his guilt and the excellence of the divine perfections, the more difficult will the means of access appear. What then can be

more agreeable to right reason, or more consoling to a tender conscience, than the discovery that "a great High Priest" has been provided to plead in our behalf, and to offer up our petitions and thanksgivings at the throne of unbounded mercy? Imperfect and sinful as we are, the mediation of our divine Intercessor cannot but be effectual; and thus are superseded innumerable austerities and superstitions to which men in every age and every country have been excited by a sense of guilt and a desire to placate the Deity by the vain rites of heathenism.

In the worship of God, as enjoined by Christianity, there are no local and inconvenient observances, such as we find in almost all false religions. The gospel being intended by its divine Founder for the religion of the whole world, was so framed as to be capable of becoming co-extensive with human nature itself. "All languages, nations, people, and tongues," may equally worship with acceptance. It neither pre-supposes nor prescribes any particular form of civil government. An enjoined pilgrimage, for example, such as that to Rome, or Mecca, or Jerusalem, would have destroyed its universality. But where is the nation that cannot adopt the public reading of God's word, and the practice of expounding his will? Where is the individual whose local circumstances or habits can prevent the aspiration of his soul to God in prayer, and the stated return of gratitude and praise? What is there to render inconvenient in any nation the love and "communion of saints," or to prevent the most elevated feelings of universal charity? The rites of heathenism were injurious to man and unworthy of God. They corresponded in fact with the nature of the fabled deities to which they referred; some of whom being severe and others voluptuous, cruelty and impurity became the respective characters of their worship. Even Judaism itself, though at first of divine establishment, yet on account of its being a ceremonial religion, a "shadow

of good things to come," was too much burdened with inconvenient and local observances to render it fit for an œcumenical church. Christianity alone can supply that great desideratum in natural religion, the method in which fallen and sinful beings can with acceptance approach and worship their justly offended Creator.

From the foregoing particulars it appears that the preaching of the gospel was admirably and specifically calculated for the office of infusing religious knowledge into mankind. This, however, was not the sole or ultimate object of its Author; for it would have been of little practical utility to have illuminated the understanding, if the heart was still suffered to remain unimpressed and unimproved. The "law of the Lord," therefore was no less intended to convert the soul" than to "enlighten the eyes." The affections of the heart having been depraved by the fall of man as well as the powers of the understanding, a complete renovation of nature was rendered necessary, in order to our entering the kingdom of heaven.

The apostle was therefore authorized and enjoined to inculcate the necessity of *conversion*. He was not only to "open the eyes" of mankind, but also to "*turn* them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

It has been already seen that Christianity begins with convincing men of their defection from their Creator; but its further design is to bring them back to their allegiance. We are taught by it that we were originally formed to be the willing subjects of our rightful Proprietor and Sovereign, upon our fidelity to whom our happiness was made to depend.

This fundamental point, though scarcely recognized by the religion of nature, is strictly conformable to the suggestions of right reason. There have been men who have denied the existence of a God, but none who, admitting his existence, have denied his claims to human affection and obedience.

The simple fact, however, as stated by revelation, is that we have all revolted to an usurper, who, in awful violation of his own duty, became an apostate himself, and has constantly employed every artifice to entice the human race to imitate his example. Having involved himself in irretrievable ruin, and caused his adorable Creator to become his enemy, he attempted, by his sinful allurements, to destroy the divine image in mankind; and our first parents having listened to his suggestions, became their victim. Since that awful moment the scriptures describe mankind as being "taken captive by the devil at his will." His kingdom is called "darkness." He is himself expressly denominated "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." We are taught that in violation of every natural rule of duty, in contempt of every natural hope of present and future happiness, we have resigned ourselves to the dominion of this apostate, who is therefore emphatically entitled "the god of this world."

This appellation he is represented as but too well deserving, since he rules absolutely and supremely in the heart of every individual who has not been "turned from darkness unto light." He allures men by the specious pleasures and advantages of sin, and terrifies them by the pretended austerities of a life of holiness; his chief aim and intention being to "keep his goods in peace."

It is easy for the skeptic to ridicule these scriptural facts, especially as upon the subject of supernatural influences, whether celestial or infernal, revelation is our only guide. There is, however, nothing contrary to reason or analogy in the general idea, though the doctrine may be abused by weak or by designing men. The evil thoughts which continually enter into minds which would be thought the best disposed, seem to indicate the existence of an agency which the scriptures inform us really takes place. Some nations have

even worshipped evil and malignant deities, so called; a system evidently absurd, since there can be but one God, and he, as was before seen, is far removed from all moral turpitude, and is "neither tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

But there is nothing but what is perfectly reasonable in the scripture statement; for it is very credible that he who has caused almost every part of the material world, so far as it comes within our knowledge, to teem with animal life, should adopt a somewhat similar plan in the creation of the intellectual world also. There is an immeasurable distance between the Divinity and the human soul; can it therefore be incredible or surprising that in this wide vacuity a super-human order of existence has been placed? This much being admitted, it is not irrational again to suppose, that a part or even the whole of these exalted intelligences may have fallen from their allegiance, and in consequence have become what the scriptures represent "Satan and his angels" to be. Had the volume of revelation asserted that the Great First Cause of all things *created* an order of sinful beings for the purpose of tempting and seducing the human race, the statement would have contradicted the most essential ideas which we can form of the divine nature:—but that evil spirits should actually exist, however awful the idea, is not inconsistent with the deductions of reason, when we consider that they are described as becoming such, not by the creative power of their divine Author, but by their own voluntary defection from his laws. That beings thus circumstanced should envy the primeval happiness of man, and in consequence endeavor to destroy his innocence, upon which they well knew that happiness depended, cannot shock our reason or our faith;—and that their artifices should be permitted to succeed, is equally within the compass of rational credibility, when we consider that the state of our first parents was probationary, and that God having

given them full power to stand, did not become the author of evil, if by their own voluntary act they fell.

If from scripture we turn to acknowledged facts, it is impossible not to perceive how completely actual experience corresponds with the revealed doctrine of man being by nature under the power of Satan. Had we duly served our Creator, it would be impossible that pain or sorrow should be known ; for moral evil is the only parent of natural evil. But admitting the scripture hypothesis of our having revolted from him, we cannot wonder that innumerable evils infest the world, and that the stage which was erected for the display of the Creator's glory, should have become one wide Aceldama, "a field of blood."

But it is not necessary to advert to the more flagrant vices as proofs of the doctrine under consideration. Sensuality, and open offences, are by no means the only designating marks of that pandemonium which revelation teaches us has been erected upon earth. It has been not unaptly remarked, that our spiritual enemy being an incorporeal being, is "neither a glutton nor a drunkard, yet still he is a devil." Pride, envy, avarice, revenge, ambition, and other mental sins, are perhaps quite as conspicuous indications of the corruption of our nature, as the most open immoralities ; especially when we recollect that these and similar vicious qualities are the characteristic marks of fallen spirits, and are directly in opposition to the mind of that holy and merciful Being to whom every amiable attribute belongs.

From these premises it may be inferred that natural religion is radically deficient in not inculcating the necessity of a change of heart analogous to that which is called in scripture *conversion* and *being born again.* For if we acknowledge, what it is indeed impossible to deny without impeaching the attributes of our Creator, that man is not at present such as he was originally made, what is more rational than that he should be

brought back to the original and appropriate dignity of his nature? What is called in scripture *conversion*, is the first approximation towards this point; what is further denominated by theologians *progressive sanctification*, consists of nearer and nearer approaches; till the consummation is at length fully attained, (which it could not be on earth,) at that eventful moment when, freed from the restraints of mortality, the renovated spirit appears in perfect glory before the throne of God.

If it be true that what is called natural religion admits into its system the doctrine of a celestial world, it is inconsistent with itself in not prescribing the qualifications which are necessary for enjoying that unknown state; and from this inconsistency the creed even of many nominal Christians is by no means free. They imagine themselves perhaps undoubted heirs to the kingdom of heaven while they are living in the very spirit of the world. They even ridicule the doctrine of *conversion* to God, though in point of fact their own system is chargeable with the very absurdities which they unjustly apply to that of others. For do not all serious and intelligent persons acknowledge that *some* change must ultimately pass upon the human soul before the spiritual delights of eternity can be congenial to its feelings? Select in a gay and thoughtless multitude the first individual who expresses a hope of arriving at heaven, and inquire whether the acknowledged employments of that exalted state correspond with the present temper of his mind. He will probably confess the negative; or if not, let him fairly try the experiment, even upon an imperfect scale, by associating for a short time exclusively with those persons who seem most to approximate to the standard of the inhabitants of the heavenly world. Banish every thing that is not connected with religion and a future state; and see how weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable such a course of life would appear in his estimation. It is obvious that such a mode of living in the present world would

be wholly inconsistent with the duties of our allotted station, nor could it indeed really take place in its full extent. But in heaven the scene will be realized, and prayer and praise and acts of divine worship will constitute the delightful and never-ceasing employment of the beatified spirit. Yet even in the inferior degree which we have imagined upon earth, how displeasing would such employments appear to the taste of an unconverted mind! How eagerly would the subject of the experiment recur to the world, to efface the uncongenial impression! Yet this is the candidate for heaven! This is the being who expects to spend eternity in adoring his Creator! The employments which, even in an inferior degree, cannot be borne for a few days upon earth, are by some unexplained process to become the highest objects of his delight throughout everlasting ages in heaven. The moment of death, it seems, is to become the moment of such a *conversion* as shall render him disposed supremely towards what had hitherto been an intolerable burden! The plain fact, however, is, that he hopes for heaven, not because it is what heaven is described to be, but because it is not hell. He confesses, if not by his lips, yet by his conduct, that he has not a single capacity for enjoying its delights; yet he expects that they shall be conferred upon him, and that the hour of death shall completely renovate him for their enjoyment.

In such a scheme what is there the least plausible or consistent? On the contrary, what can be more rational, as well as scriptural, than to suppose that the candidate for heaven is to be gradually prepared upon earth for his eternal employment; and that as he had quitted his God, and entered into allegiance with the spirit of evil, he should be brought back to his Creator, and thus, through the merits of his Saviour, and the renovation of the Holy Spirit, be "made *meet* to be a partaker of the inheritance amongst the saints in light?" So far therefore from there being any thing ridiculous

in this doctrine of a moral and spiritual change, renovation of heart, all the absurdities find refuge on the other side of the argument. It is even inconsistent with reason for a being whose present enjoyments are sinful and worldly to expect that the mere circumstance of dissolution, the mere disjunction of soul and body, shall so entirely change his long-acquired habits as necessarily to render him fit for the enjoyment of a state of existence which is opposed to all his incipient predilections and desires. This would indeed be *instantaneous conversion* in a sense which every thinking man must be ashamed to own.

But Christianity entirely obviates these and similar difficulties by showing that we must be fitted upon earth for the anticipated enjoyments of heaven. The gospel is built upon this simple hypothesis, that a sinner is not fit to be admitted into the celestial world; and that, even if admitted, he could not enjoy its delights. It supposes that a process of spiritual education is required, which may be compared to that of a minor about to take possession of a foreign estate. Its object being not only to exhibit pardon for transgression, but ultimately to bring us back to the original perfections of our nature, and to enlarge those perfections to an inconceivable extent, it regards us as in a probationary state, and commences its operations, even in the present world, by "turning us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Christianity represents this change of heart as necessary, not only to the open profligate, but even to persons moral and sincere. Such was Saint Paul himself. Nor is the doctrine unreasonable; for have not we *all*, even the best of us, wandered from our Creator, and unfitted ourselves for the spiritual enjoyments of the unseen world? If so, how complete a conversion of mind must ensue before we can be restored to the lost dignities and happiness which we all profess an anxiety to recover!

Conversion to God, when scripturally explained, and divested of those unjust associations which fastidiousness or ignorance often connect with the term, is at once the most sublime and rational as well as happy change which can pass upon a fallen being. It includes far more than a partial or external reformation, for it extends to the very "spirit of the mind." Every power and faculty of the soul is taught to assume a new and more exalted tendency. The Almighty dignifies and hallows by his presence that temple of the heart which had been desecrated by the occupation of a rival. The individual who had "forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn out to himself cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water," now returning to the inexhaustible Source of goodness and perfection, finds every want and every wish supplied. He is enabled through Christ to repose in God as his ruler, his guardian, and his friend, and to commune with him by prayer, and praise, and submissive confidence. Every want which he feels serves but to unite him more closely to that great and gracious Being, who is both able and willing to supply it. When weak, he relies on him who is all-powerful; when he most discovers his own ignorance, he looks to him who is infinitely wise; when surrounded with enemies and dangers, he prays to him who is ever watchful; in a word, every defect in himself causes him to depend more implicitly and humbly upon the perfections of his God.

A thousand new and interesting sentiments now occupy his heart. That holy Being whom he once regarded only as a justly offended Judge, he now venerates as a merciful Creator, regards with pious gratitude as his Preserver, reveres as his Almighty Parent, loves as his Redeemer, invokes as his Comforter in affliction, and his Sanctifier amidst the pollutions of the world. His trust in God is, however, radically different from the unfounded hope of an unchanged mind.

It is a trust perfectly rational as well as devout, and such as is quite consistent with reason, though it could have been produced only by the energetic influence of unsophisticated Christianity. Believing that "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," he infers, with the inspired writer, that "with him he will freely give us all things." He trusts therefore to God to do for him, "exceeding abundantly above all that he *asks* or *thinks*;"—that is, beyond the most enlarged prayer of faith, and beyond the most unbounded wishes of the heart.

Here then we have arrived at a highly important and interesting part of the Christian dispensation, and one in which it infinitely transcends the supposed religion of nature; namely, the superiority of its promises and rewards. When Saint Paul was instructed to open men's eyes, and as an instrument to turn their hearts, he was informed also of the benefits that were attached to a cordial reception of his message. Where had been the motive for a return to God, were not some blessing connected with the duty? The apostle was therefore further commissioned to preach "*forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified*," as the gift of God offered to the returning and believing penitent.

In order more fully to estimate the superiority of the gospel over natural religion, it may not be uninteresting to enter into a slight survey of the nature and extent of these invaluable benefactions.

The rewards of Christianity are by no means similar in any respect to those which heathenism was able to propose. Infinitely differing from the fabled fields of Elysium, or the paradise of the false prophet of Arabia, the heaven of Christians is perfectly spiritual and angelic. It neither influences the desires, nor appeals to the passions, of the unrenewed heart. Saint Paul was authorized to promise simply, "forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified;"

the former of which may be considered as referring to the benefits conferred by the gospel in the present world, the latter to its consummation in the life to come.

The proclamation of a pardon through the merits of a Redeemer, applied to us upon our repentance and faith, is that great blessing of the gospel to which all others, both for time and eternity, are appended. That change of heart which has already been considered, is, in itself, a blessing of no ordinary magnitude; for when we view the natural ignorance and depravity of mankind, we cannot surely but esteem it an act of infinite mercy in our Creator to bring us back in any measure to our original state of holiness and peace. How rationally therefore does Christianity proceed in exerting its energies upon the human heart! It begins with *repentance;* which is not a momentary pang, a transient compunction, but a deep and lasting impression upon the mind, and the commencement of a mutation of the whole character. Under its influence sin appears as offensive in its nature as it is dangerous in its consequences. The spirit is humbled towards its offended Creator, and is thus placed, as it were, in a fit attitude for the reception of mercy. Repentance softens the heart; or, to use a scriptural metaphor, "breaks up the fallow ground," and prepares it for imbibing the gentle dews of divine compassion which fall unheeded on the callous and impenitent offender. It tends, as it were, to repair, if this were possible, the injury which had been offered to the divine perfections, since it admits the claims of the Creator to our obedience, confesses the guilt of our transgressions, acknowledges the justice and propriety of our sentence, and teaches us to commit ourselves wholly to that transcendent wisdom and compassion which alone could devise the plan of our redemption.

To penitence, the scriptures teach us to add *faith*, which, by uniting us to the Redeemer, puts us in pos-

session of all the blessings which he lived and died upon earth to procure. These blessings are concisely included in the scriptural term *justification*, which is that act of divine beneficence by which we are considered as absolved through Christ from our sins, and become by adoption heirs to the felicities of a future world. When man had offended the Majesty of Heaven, his omnipotent Judge saw fit to accept a propitiatory sacrifice in his behalf. *Faith* embraces or lays hold of the benefit thus procured.

It should, however, be remarked, that the requisitions of the law under which we were created are not done away, nor is *faith* considered as a sort of equivalent which God was willing to accept in place of complete obedience. The substitution which Christianity admits is not in the duty itself, but in the application of a vicarious merit. While, however, the blessings under consideration are thus represented as purchased for us, and bestowed gratuitously, they never become ours till, as the Church expresses it, "with hearty repentance and true faith we turn unto God;" so that it is antichristian and impious to profess to depend upon the Saviour for justification, if we are not partakers, in some humble measure at least, of that renovated character to which the promised benefits are exclusively attached.

The next blessing resulting from that forgiveness of sins which the apostle was commanded to promulgate, is *mutual reconciliation;* for "being justified by faith, we have *peace with God.*" Christianity supposes us to be by nature hostile to the divine laws and perfections; it views us as having not only quitted the path of duty, but as lifting up our feeble arm in open rebellion against Omnipotence. Unassisted reason, therefore, could never have devised any mode of reunion without giving up that supreme holiness which forbids the access of a sinner to the divine presence,

and that equity which demands the punishment of his transgressions.

But the substitution of a Mediator has removed the impediment. The infinite source of purity and justice has been proved to be not less the fountain of unextinguishable mercy. Attracted by this display of the love of his Creator, the returning penitent is led to cast away the hostile weapons of rebellion, and to repose in holy confidence upon that heavenly Parent who is ever willing to receive his once offending child. A hallowed amity, if such a mode of speech be allowable, now ensues, which is evinced on the part of man by prayer, and love, and sacred meditation, and praise; and, on the part of the Almighty, not only in pardoning sin, but in diffusing through the soul a holy serenity, a "peace which passeth all understanding," the consequence and the companion of Christian faith.

The believer thus *justified* and *at peace* with God, is said to be adopted into his family: he is affiliated with saints and angels, and is even considered as united to the Son of God himself by a fraternal bond. Thus made "an heir of God and joint heir with Christ," he becomes mercifully entitled to that "inheritance among them that are sanctified," which the apostle was commissioned to proclaim.

The Christian's union to his Creator is far more strict and endearing than that merely natural tie of creation and preservation by which the Deity may be considered as the Father of all mankind. Being adopted into so heavenly a household, he begins, as it were, to assimilate with the family into which he has been received; his dispositions and habits are changed; "old things are passed away, and behold all things are become new." Every object even in nature is now rendered more interesting and lovely to him by being viewed as the work of his Almighty Parent; and thus tends to raise his mind in cheerful adoration towards the unbounded source from which it derived

its existence. Even this mortal life is endeared and exalted by its connexion with the enjoyments of the celestial world; and death itself begins to lose its terrors, by being viewed as but the removal of a veil which interposed between the Christian and his Father's throne.

Thus adopted into the family of God, he is "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." He feels that far more than his own unassisted strength is requisite to preserve him in the paths of holiness and obedience; yet he doubts not that He who prepared the inheritance towards which he is hastening, will enable him to overcome every difficulty in his progress to it, both "guiding him with his counsel," and afterwards "receiving him to glory."

Here then is the *consummation* of the gospel. The apostle was to preach "the forgiveness of sins," not as a final end, but as a means and preparative towards the obtaining that eternal "inheritance among them which are sanctified," which is the ultimate, the immeasurable blessing of the economy of human salvation. Christianity has not only eclipsed natural religion by showing how sin might be forgiven, and in what manner, even in the present life, the various benefits connected with that forgiveness might be attained, but it has also superadded an eternal reward, which "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

The more we contemplate the final blessings proposed by revelation, the more, as was before noticed, will the sacred writings be seen to outvie every false religion. What, for example, are the highest enjoyments offered by that system which professed to be an improvement, not only on natural religion and the code of Moses, but upon Christianity itself? The heaven of Mahommed is but a fancied scene, where the voluptuary may indulge in sensual delights with somewhat greater zest and less satiety than was possible upon

earth. It is, in fact, but a slight refinement upon the vicious pleasures of an oriental palace. It supposes mankind in a future state to possess no other senses and appetites than those which enslave him in the present world.

But Christianity may be said to add to the renovated soul a new faculty as incomprehensible by nature as colors to a blind man; namely, that of enjoying the presence of God. It is a strong collateral proof of the divine origin of the Christian system, that there is nothing in it calculated to fascinate the natural passions of the soul. Its highest rewards are purely spiritual and refined. They are such as nature unreformed does not covet and could not enjoy. The whole dispensation is calculated to raise mankind above the grosser elements of which he is composed, and to make the celestial part of his nature predominate over the sensual and terrene. How elevated soever paganism might be supposed to appear in some of its less disgusting points of observation, it loses all its dignity the moment we survey it in its secret mysteries and retirements. The gospel, on the other hand, assumes new claims to admiration in proportion as it is more minutely inspected. Its very *arcana*, and *adyta*, and *penetralia*, are not only free from licentiousness or absurd observances, but are eminently marked by the contrary characteristics of holiness and rational obedience. It affects no concealment: the only difference between the outward court and the inner recesses of the Christian temple is, that the one is holy, the other the "holiest of holies."

The unspeakable reward of future glory which is offered to the believer includes an assimilation to the Divine image, and a fruition of the beatific presence in heaven. "It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is." Even upon earth, the tendency of the gospel, where practically

admitted into the heart in its true energy and power, is so to "transform men in the spirit of their minds," as to bring them back in no small measure to the original dignity of their nature. Its influence is, however, constantly impeded by that "body of sin" which can never be wholly conquered upon earth; so that the anxious Christian learns to look forward with ardent desire to that future world in which sin and imperfection shall be forever done away.

In this new and exalted state, we are taught that even our outward frame itself shall be clothed with inconceivable glory; for Jesus Christ "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." At present, neither the spiritual nor the terrestrial part of our nature could sustain long and exquisite enjoyment: excess, as has been frequently witnessed in a sudden transition from deep grief to unexpected joy, would soon dissolve the feeble union that subsists between the soul and the frail receptacle to which it is consigned. But in heaven, the powers and capacities of our nature being immeasurably enlarged, the promised beatitude will not be confined to that scanty measure which a merely human being could endure. He who pours forth the exuberant streams of eternal bliss, will correspondently enlarge and deepen the thirsty channel in which they are to flow.

The human soul and body, thus glorified, we are taught, shall be admitted into sacred mansions suitable to their exalted destiny. "We know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The future world, however, may be better understood when considered as a state than as a place, or, in other words, as an eternal abode where the God and Father of all condescends to exhibit more immediately his unveiled perfections, pro-

ducing happiness inexpressible in all who are thus admitted to his presence.

Here, however, the human mind finds its highest conceptions inadequate and futile. We know not, we cannot know, what is included in the idea of the unclouded and reconciled presence of our Creator. The nearest earthly approach is infinite distance. "Present in the body, we are absent from the Lord." Our brightest light is darkness, compared with that effulgence of glory which shall burst upon the enraptured soul, when, "released from the burden of the flesh," it begins its new and infinitely happy existence. The veil shall be drawn aside, and the "light of God's countenance," the smile of Heaven, be fully visible. Rapt in celestial bliss, the redeemed spirit shall survey the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," the boundless, the inexhaustible ocean of perfection; the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all created things.

The image of the Creator will then clearly appear in his works, which will doubtless convey to the soul made perfect in knowledge, the most stupendous proofs of the divine intelligence and power. Yet still more conspicuously will these glories appear in that co-equal and co-eternal Son, who, by his incarnation, became "the Mediator between God and man;" but who, even in his state of humility, was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

It was the promise of the Son of God, when upon earth, that where he is, there shall his servants be. Saint Paul therefore longed "to depart and to be with Christ," which he considered as "far better" than to remain chained (to adopt his allusion to the Roman malefactor) to a polluted body of sin and death. In fact, the love that the Christian bears to his Redeemer, as well as our inability to consider celestial beings otherwise than through some medium intelligible

to the human mind, concur to make the presence of the once incarnate, but now risen and glorified Saviour, a high object of the Christian's wishes, and, as it were, a tangible blessing, on which to repose his meditations.

But, great as are the manifestations of God the Father in his works and in his eternal Son, they will not supersede the immediate aspect of the Father himself. Divinity only, pure, unveiled divinity, so far at least as the sight can be supported by created intelligences, will be necessary to complete the enjoyment of the future world, and to fill and bound the vast desires and affections of the enraptured soul.

This vision of the Deity must of necessity excite new and increasing degrees of love and admiration; and these in return shall give birth to new capabilities of pleasure and enjoyment. No pause, no satiety, shall occur to obstruct the full tide of everlasting bliss. Conformity to the will of God, and assimilation to his image, will be at once the duty and the reward of the glorified inhabitants of heaven.

This reward cannot be forfeited; this duty cannot be infringed; for the future state of bliss being a scene not of probation but of reward, not of experiment but of unchangeable security, the same power that created the spirit for enjoyment will preserve it forever from all hazard of defection. Nothing that defileth can procure admission into the angelic world; so that the holiness and felicity which are once communicated, must remain unclouded and eternal as the God from whom they were derived.

It is not difficult to represent a belief in these promises of the gospel as enthusiastic and visionary; but, in fact, so far from such charges being well founded, the intellect of man, when seriously exerted, can conceive of no reward more suitable to the original dignity of our nature, or more fully consistent with the supposed aptitudes of things, than the eternal enjoyment of the divine presence and perfections. Such a reward

is quite congruous to the most exalted conceptions which we can form of the nature of the human soul and its real capacity for happiness. Yet, what system of religion, so called, the gospel excepted, has ever professed to make these exalted blessings the objects of desire? The slightest contemplation of the real ends for which our existence was bestowed, would lead us, we might conceive, to the irresistible conclusion that our real dignity and happiness, as spiritual and intellectual beings, consisted in the conscious presence and approbation of our Creator. Yet we find that after all the speculations of philosophy, after the highest efforts of the most exalted minds, nothing short of a divine revelation could point out an idea at once so rational and sublime, so worthy of the most dignified understanding, and so grateful to the renovated heart. He only who made man, and knew what would satisfy him, could point out his ultimate destination, and propose a reward commensurate with the loftiest desires of his soul.

How powerful a relief in calamity, how cheering a consolation in sickness, how blessed a source of comfort and repose upon the bed of death, is a scripturally grounded hope and evidence that the heaven described in the sacred writings shall be our portion! The code of natural religion, with all its boasted excellencies, never professed to offer so divine an alleviation of the adversities of life. The suggestions of natural reason may point out a few half-disclosed truths, and thus serve either to torture a guilty conscience, or, by giving a partial estimate, lull it to a deceitful repose; but they have no superadded power to confer a rational and exalted felicity. But revelation has cast a ray of heavenly light, to cheer the most dreary paths of human existence. It penetrates with its holy beam the dark "valley of the shadow of death." The grave itself loses its terrors. The last enemy is destroyed. The Christian quits a world of trouble and

disappointment, only that he may enter upon a happy and eternal abode. "He is not dead, but sleepeth," expecting in the morning of the resurrection to be awakened to everlasting joy, when, having fully obtained by his Redeemer the "forgiveness of sins," he shall become a partaker of an unfading "inheritance among *them that are sanctified.*"

This last qualifying expression points out an important practical inference respecting our admission into the celestial world. "Without *holiness* no man shall see the Lord." The most plausible argument which is usually urged against the gratuitous nature of the salvation and blessings offered in the gospel is, that such a system is prejudicial to the important interests of morality. It was not therefore without reason that in the commission of the apostle the *qualification* for entering heaven was as explicitly pointed out as the doctrine of free pardon and the promise of future enjoyment. In connexion, then, with the assertion that the promised inheritance is for "them that are *sanctified*,"* it may not be useless to prove that revelation, while it opposes that first dictate of natural religion, that our reward must be in consequence of human merit, is, nevertheless, not merely the best means of securing those important objects which moral philosophy has ever vainly labored to obtain, but that it infi-

* The author is of course aware that this word, like many others which every Christian writer has occasion to use, is, in common language, greatly diverted from its proper application, and is seldom heard but in an ironical panegyric. While, however, it is to be lamented if any thing in the shape of cant or affectation has ever given even a *pretext* for identifying any scriptural term with ideas of hypocrisy, we must not consent to sacrifice to that consideration one single phrase that may be found in the Bible, or be serviceable in technical or devotional theology. While the apostle designates his converts as persons "called to be *saints*," while heaven is spoken of as the possession of those only who are "*sanctified*," and while from our infancy we speak of the Holy Spirit as "him who *sanctifieth* us and all the elect people of God," there can be no excuse for a Christian and a member of the established Church employing this expression as a term of reproach, or omitting to employ it in its proper place as the characteristic mark of the Christian profession.

nitely surpasses in its effects the highest virtues which unassisted reason could inculcate or even conceive.

In the first place, the *motives* and *assistances* to duty which are presented by the religion of nature, are wholly inadequate to the end proposed. The best moral suasion of the heathen writers was scarcely susceptible of an application to common occurrences. Abstract arguments and metaphysical researches, however interesting as speculations, were not likely to be applied, in any considerable degree, to the real details of life. Even the philosophers themselves were seldom so much influenced by their own favorite systems, as to make any very considerable sacrifices for the cause of what they themselves allowed to be virtue ; and with regard to the majority of the people, who of course stood most in need of moral instruction, the disquisitions of the academic sages were wholly beyond their powers of comprehension.

The classical philosophy seems almost to view man as a speculative etherial intelligence, who needs only to be informed of what is right in order to induce him to pursue it. It proceeds upon the radical mistake of supposing that our nature, as it now exists, is more propense to what is right than what is wrong; and hence its dictates, though capable perhaps of influencing a truly rational and innocent being, such as man once was, are wholly inadequate to the present situation of human nature, and afford no sufficient check to human depravity. The mere deductions of reason, however correct, will not often restrain the impetuosity of the passions, or overcome the claims of present interest or pleasure. To know what is good and reasonable is but a single advance even to moral virtue, and will be of little practical utility without some efficacious *motive* to give our knowledge effect. But here the boasted philosophy of Greece and Rome completely failed. It neither gave the desire to pursue a self-de-

nying course of duty, nor, if the desire existed, was able to foster it by adequate assistance.

Yet, still further; the principles of action, as inculcated by the heathen moralist, even *were* they adequate in point of strength, will usually be found more or less injurious in their tendency and operation. Certain at least it is, that they are in most cases diametrically opposed to what we, as Christians, are taught in the humbling self-denying precepts of the gospel; so that we may justly wonder why men professing the holy religion of Jesus Christ, should so often inculcate as adequate and legitimate motives these inefficient, and often positively injurious, sanctions and incitements.

But Christianity abundantly supplies these defects of natural religion. Its principles of action are strong and influential in the highest degree; and what adds inestimably to their value is, that they are as pure and rational in their origin as they are efficacious in their tendency. They speak to the feelings of the warmest heart, without offending the calmest understanding. Never, as in heathen moralists, is a shining action recommended from a corrupt motive, or one vice patronized in order to expel another.

Let us proceed to view the motives and assistances held out by the gospel a little more closely, as in them consists much of the moral beauty and excellency of the system. The first appeal of revelation is to our hopes. Pardon of sin and an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven are exhibited, as we have already seen, as the rewards of the believer; while the pains of hell are held forth as the portion of the unbelieving. The extent and value of the promised blessing have been already considered; nor is the correlative threatening a less powerful sanction. The one is the highest bliss, perhaps, that Deity can bestow; the other the greatest suffering that man can bear. There is nothing sordid, as deists would persuade us, in the hopes of such a

reward, or degrading in the dread of such a punishment. Even self-love, when employed in so high and rational an aim as that of avoiding eternal misery, and endeavoring to obtain eternal happiness, cannot be fairly estimated as a servile or degrading principle. It becomes dignified by its associations. That which when employed upon earthly objects was ignoble and confined, instantly assumes a new and higher character by being connected with the unseen and eternal world.

It should be remembered, as an argument in reasoning with the deist, that when he urges against revelation that virtue is its own reward, and that nothing extrinsic should be added as a motive to its performance, he, in thus attempting to wound Christianity, destroys the sanctions also of what he allows to be natural religion. The common assertion, that no action can be truly laudable that is not performed without hope or expectation of future reward, is an assumption wholly destitute of proof. Indeed nothing can be more rational than the supposition that God, who knew the weakness of human reason and the strength of human passions, should see fit to appeal to our hopes and fears, in order to strengthen us in the performance of our duty. It should be remembered also, that the future rewards and punishments revealed in the gospel, are not mere *mercenary* considerations, but are intimately connected with our Creator's approbation or displeasure; and *these* at least will surely be allowed to be legitimate and laudable excitements, on the same principle as the wish of a parent is a motive to a dutiful child, even irrespectively of the immediate punishment or reward with which it may be connected.

Thus then the gospel does not influence to holy obedience *merely* by an appeal to our hopes and fears, but also by the powerful excitements of gratitude and love. Here then, at least, the deist himself must be

constrained to acknowledge that there is nothing mercenary or sordid; but, on the contrary, all that can elevate and refine human conduct and affections. The most ingenuous and disinterested feelings of the soul are stimulated to action; and what was commanded as a duty is rendered valuable as a privilege, and pleasing as an enjoyment. The "law of love" is the Christian's highest inducement to obedience.

From this generous source must necessarily flow "whatsoever is lovely and of good report." We cannot but "love God" when we really know that "he first loved us;" and gratitude thus produced is a principle of action far more efficacious than the most elaborate deductions of human reason.

The love of the Redeemer to mankind is constantly proposed in scripture as an incitement to the cheerful performance of the divine commands. It is a motive which unassisted reason could never have discovered, yet one that in actual experiment invariably produces the most sublime effects; of which the actions and sufferings of apostles, and saints, and martyrs are irrefragable proofs.

The solution of this fact is easy. The renewed mind, when duly affected by the "agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, the precious death and burial," of the merciful Redeemer, cannot but turn with abhorrence from those things which caused so awful and distressing a scene; and while it proceeds further to consider that "glorious resurrection and ascension," which succeeded the Passion, it will scarcely fail to deduce the inference, that if "we are risen with Christ," we should "seek those things which are above," and that as the Redeemer "ascended to the right hand of God," so should we also "in heart and mind thither ascend."

The freedom and fulness of our pardon, far from encouraging the true Christian to sin, necessarily causes penitential sorrow; and in proportion as the

offered blessing appears valuable, the dread of being excluded from it will be increased. The uncertainty of the supposed rewards of natural religion, amounting at best to nothing more than a hope or probability, tended to discourage the cultivation of the more difficult and unostentatious virtues: in the same manner, therefore, the unequivocal plainness and immutability of the Christian promises must have a powerful and efficacious effect upon the heart; knowing, as the Apostle observes, that we "so run, not as uncertainly; so fight we, not as one that beateth the air."

In a word, God's mercy gives birth to love, and love is the parent of obedience. The scriptures represent this principle of love to God as that without which no action can be acceptably performed. The dread of eternal punishment, and the hopes of eternal reward, are powerfully calculated to arouse men from their spiritual slumbers, and to excite them to moral activity; but it is the superadded principle of love that inclines them to universal and cheerful obedience. Love to God is essentially connected with a desire to promote his glory; and though this desire, in its incipient state, is nearly allied to a most laudable feeling of self-interest on account of our own personal salvation, yet in the advanced Christian it begins to acquire a more simple character; so that ultimately the divine honor becomes the supreme object of regard, even when there is no direct reference to our own personal interest and salvation. When the principle of love to God has thus begun to identify the Christian's personal gratification with whatever he conceives to tend to the glory of his Almighty Maker, or rather has made the one predominate over the other, there exists a motive to duty infinitely surpassing all that human reason could suggest. Thus "love is the fulfilling of the law."

Another important guarantee for virtue which Christianity possesses above the alleged religion of nature is

that new principle which it is the instrument of infusing into the soul. Not satisfied with suggesting the most powerful motives, it renders the heart susceptible of their efficacy. Sanctions the most awful and impressive, rebound from the callous heart of an unrenewed man; there is no aptitude to receive the hallowed impression: but true religion begins with rendering the heart soft, and creating in the soul a holy disposition to perform the commands of God.

A new nature thus implanted is the most satisfactory pledge for "newness of life." Duty now becomes a delightful obligation, and is in exact accordance with the renovated feelings of the soul. What was once viewed only as proper and expedient, is now grateful and inviting; what was always allowed to be good in itself, now begins to assume the character of pleasure in its effects. The commands of God are performed, not merely because they are consistent with right reason, or even because they are accompanied with sanctions the most important, but because they are really congenial to the dearest wishes of the renewed heart.

Natural religion applies its suasion to men as they naturally exist. Christianity begins by changing them so as to produce a fitness for those things which are required to be done, but which could never be rendered truly cordial to an unrenewed heart. It does not, as it were, command a grovelling reptile to fly towards heaven; but, by transforming its nature, and adding to it wings, gives to it a corresponding desire to exercise its newly-acquired functions. The Christian being transferred "from the power of Satan unto God," his new perceptions and desires are regulated by the laws of the country into which he has been naturalized. He is not a prisoner, who, being forcibly confined in a foreign land, still retains his native customs and predilections, and desires to pursue them without restraint; but a voluntary subject, who, from a land of slavery,

has sought refuge under a kind and tender sovereign, whose commands it his delight to obey.

Surely it is a considerable mark of divine tenderness, as well as the most satisfactory pledge for human obedience, that the Almighty does not make us slaves but subjects; that he does not translate us from the kingdom of an usurper to his own, without also convincing us of the benefit of the exchange, and inspiring us with a love and admiration for the new course of life on which we are about to enter. By nature we are at once ignorant and rebellious; we neither properly comprehend the laws of God, nor desire to obey them; it is therefore an additional mercy from his hands, that, in the case of a returning penitent, the Holy Spirit so moulds the will, so guides the affections, and so rectifies the waywardness of the understanding, that "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Thus that obedience to God, which even a deist must allow to be a "reasonable" service, becomes, to the genuine and devout Christian, a source of unaffected delight; for He who promised that he would "lead captivity captive," promised also that "his people should be willing in the day of his power."

Here then we have naturally arrived at the most important particular in which the Christian dispensation has provided for the interests of morality and virtue far beyond the utmost that unenlightened reason could perform. Even *had* it been possible for human reason to have discovered and applied the most powerful motives to duty, yet it must still have failed in ensuring a corresponding practice; for so greatly is our nature "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," that none but He who originally formed the human soul can re-inspire it with its long-lost regard for true purity and heavenly-mindedness.

On this part of the subject, namely, the absolute necessity of divine assistance, natural religion was

quite silent. The classic moralists did not profess to expect any thing analogous to what Christians are accustomed to call the ordinary influences of the sacred Spirit, and without which we justly believe that "nothing is strong, nothing is holy." They seem, indeed, occasionally to have felt that something more than the unassisted energies of nature was necessary for human direction; but not being blessed with the light of revelation, their ideas did not attain a form sufficiently definite to produce any good effect upon their conduct. The views of the heathen on the subject of divine agency were among the most visionary and delusive parts of their system; and if we may judge of what they conceived to be the effect of supernatural operation by the frantic language and behavior of their oracular priestesses, we shall have no cause to lament that they did not carry their fabulous and wicked system into the ordinary affairs of life.

But how practical, how powerful, how judicious, is the doctrine of divine agency, as revealed in scripture! God "worketh in us both to *will* and to *do*, of his good pleasure;" or, as the passage is correctly paraphrased by our Church, he "giveth the will, and worketh with us when we have the will." Thus every good thought, and word, and action, flows from the great Inspirer; yet, on the other hand, no license is given to carelessness or enthusiasm, since we know that he usually works by means, employing and consecrating the faculties of the understanding and the affections of the soul to produce the beneficial result.

The apostles, in preaching the necessity of holiness, do not leave us uninformed respecting the Agent by whose instrumentality it is to be effected. Saint Paul implores for his converts, "that the God of peace would sanctify them wholly;" and in another place he speaks of the "*sanctification* of the Spirit," connected with "*belief* of the truth," as the graces through which we are "chosen unto salvation." Our Saviour had ex-

pressly promised the gift of the Holy Ghost as the Comforter and Sanctifier of the Church; and having once effused his celestial influences in a plenary manner on the day of Pentecost, he continues a gradual and unfailing supply of them to the end of time. This gift was indeed as much purchased for us by our Redeemer as any other benefit of his cross and passion; and hence, perhaps, the third person in the adorable Trinity is denominated "the Spirit of Christ:" thus our santification, as much as our justification, is ultimately in virtue of the merits and mediation of our divine Intercessor. Indeed, an express object of our Lord's mission was our sanctification; for "he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Being constituted Head of the Church, our Saviour infuses into the Christian these holy dispositions, and assists him by his sacred Spirit in bringing them into practice. Amongst the immediate means which he employs for this end, his own example when he was upon earth is, by itself, an infinitely stronger motive than any which natural religion can supply. Where shall we see virtue so visibly embodied and so efficaciously recommended to mankind as in the conduct of our Lord? He was a perfect character. All the qualities that adorn human nature were in him conspicuously sublime; so that no virtue was wanting, no one had a disproportionate pre-eminence, or diverged, as we often see to be the case in the best of human examples, towards its neighboring vice. His mildness, for instance, never degenerated into fear of man, nor his compassion into a morbid sensibility. In perusing the evangelists, we once or twice perceive the tear of pity or of friendship, but never the broad mirth of folly, or the traces of any hateful or improper passion. He is not like his harbinger, the Baptist, solitary and austere; much less is he, like some of the boasted

sages of Greece and Rome, frivolous or dissolute.* Infinitely removed from harsh inflexibility of soul, he was equally distant from those opposite defects which, under the name of "amiable weaknesses," are oftentimes suffered to blemish otherwise estimable characters. There was an admirable diversity of excellence, but all his excellencies fully harmonized and combined. He was not avaricious, neither was he profuse: he did not rashly rush among enemies; neither, when the duty which he had undertaken called for his presence, did he avoid them. He was neither blind to the faults of his followers; nor, on the other hand, did he censure them with unkind severity. He pardoned sin, but he did not encourage it. In a word, he was all that he enjoined others to become: nay more; for to us his command is to love our neighbor *as* ourselves, while he willingly did far more by resigning his own life for others.

Retrace his conduct from the manger to the tomb, and judge whether any moralist or philosopher has exhibited such an example for human imitation. Behold his toils, his sufferings, his virtues; follow him to the Temple, to the Mount, along the streets of the Jewish metropolis, to the grave of his beloved friend, to the scenes of his various miracles, to his confidential retirements with his chosen followers, to the garden of Gethsemane, to the place of crucifixion,—and then decide whether every word and action be not worthy of his character as "God manifest in the flesh." Surely it is a delightful employment thus to trace the "Sun of Righteousness" through his glorious circuit; to

* This last epithet may appear rather harsh as applied to the more eminent moralists and philosophers; but if we intimately survey the character even of Socrates himself, the most virtuous of the race, we shall find such flagrant blemishes as are wholly inconsistent with right notions of morality. Compare, for example, our Saviour's motives for visiting "publicans and sinners," with those parts of the conduct of Socrates which have been impiously adduced as a parallel, and then judge if there be not an essential difference between human virtue and divine.

behold him emerging, as it were, from the chambers of the East, and arriving in a silent but uniform progress at the meridian of his glory, and at length setting, red indeed with blood, but increasing to the eye in magnitude, and irradiated with the cheering beams of heavenly mildness. The brilliancy of his career might have dazzled us too much, had it not been for the dark cloud in which he went down; and we might have thought he had set forever, had not the third day beheld him rising again with a lustre never to be darkened.

The conduct of the Messiah, so far at least as it stands unconnected with the peculiar nature of the office which he undertook to perform, is at once the best pattern and the strongest inducement to mankind. Our Church, therefore, has beautifully described the Christian profession, as being "to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin and rise again unto holiness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." Had Christianity done nothing more than exhibit so unequalled an Exemplar for our imitation, it would have far outvied the religion of nature; but when, in addition to this, we find that it suggests the most powerful motives to duty, and promises the aid of Omnipotence itself for our assistance in the performance of it, we cannot but be struck with admiration at the multiplied incitements which have been provided for accomplishing an object which unassisted philosophy applauded, but could never have obtained.

Illustrious, however, as the gospel appears from these obvious considerations, it must not be forgotten that we have hitherto surveyed but a small part of its character on the subject of morality. To suggest motives, and promise divine assistance, is far from being the whole of its extensive province. The pre-

ceding remarks have proceeded more or less upon the tacit supposition that mankind were already acquainted with the nature of their obligations, and wanted only incentives to the fulfilment of them. Now, we have seen that, even upon this ground, and admitting the light of nature itself to point out the right line of human conduct, still the powers of Christianity were essentially requisite in order to incite the moralist to put in practice his own acknowledged speculations. But thus to confine the argument would rob genuine religion of one of its most important features. The plain fact is, that natural religion is as defective in the object to be attained as in the motives to its attainment. When Saint Paul was commanded to proclaim "an inheritance among them that are *sanctified*," he was not taught to apply that expressive epithet to any degree of virtue or moral excellence that reason, unassisted by revelation, was able to inculcate. Christian holiness and natural morality are far from being convertible terms. For the sake of argument, the word *virtue* and others of a similar kind have been occasionally employed in the preceding pages, not, however, as if virtue, and reformation, and terms of kindred import, were expressive of the whole duty of man, but simply in order to show the inadequacy of natural religion to secure even the more obvious and universally allowed injunctions of the heathen moralists themselves. Had the Greek and Roman philosophers possessed all the motives and inducements which have just been mentioned as belonging to the gospel revelation, still their system would have been essentially defective in consequence of their ignorance of the exact objects which were to be gained, and the principles on which so powerful an apparatus was intended to bear. Human reason not only cannot duly enforce true obedience, but cannot even define it. It is often as blind as it is impotent. Where even it suggests what is right, it does not suggest enough. It inculcates

the exterior virtues, but does not extend like Christianity to "the spirit of the mind." A restoration to the moral image of God, that image in which man was created, but which he has tarnished by sin, though allowedly a consummation highly rational, and corresponding in dignity with our most exalted conceptions of the human soul, forms no part of the system of unenlightened nature.

But Christianity applies itself primarily to this important point. *Devotion to God* is the sum and substance of the practical parts of the gospel, and from this new principle are made to flow all the virtues and the graces of the Christian character. Saint Paul, in the words which have been already so often quoted, was taught to inculcate "*faith** that is in Christ Jesus," as the instrument of our obtaining the "inheritance among those that are sanctified." Now this faith being a heavenly and operative principle, the holy effects of which are not accidental but invariable and essential, morality cannot fail to be amongst its constant fruits. Faith prompts the believer not only to rely implicitly on God's mercy, but also to yield himself willingly and wholly to his service. Its never-failing companion is love; so that the Christian's obedience becomes cordial and unreserved: he views sanctification of heart as a privilege which is graciously confer-

* On the subject of *faith*, as the instrument of our being put into possession of the blessings of the gospel, something may, and indeed ought, to be said; especially as men are constantly recurring to that dictate of natural religion, that we are saved by human works, and are apt to consider the scripture doctrine on this subject as hostile to morality. The author, however, having already discussed the subject at some length in the third Essay of this volume, refers his reader back to that Essay for various remarks to prove, 1st, that we are "justified by faith," and 2d, that the faith so mentioned is the *necessary* parent of holiness and good works. In fact, this is one great turning point between natural religion and revealed; and the arguments usually employed on the other side of the question are much oftener derived from mere moralists and philosophers than from the sacred pages of inspiration.

red, and not a yoke which he is obliged unwillingly to sustain.

The native predilections and habits of the fallen mind are mortified and conquered by a new and efficacious principle of Christian holiness. The natural tenants of the heart begin to give place to a more celestial train of visitants. Man is thus put into a state which would greatly resemble his aboriginal perfection, were it not for the melancholy fact, that sin still survives, and by its constant struggles for pre-eminence counteracts the free expansion of that heavenly principle which has been implanted. This contest terminates only with that last sigh which wafts the soul to the presence of its Maker; so that upon Christian principles, perfection upon earth is obviously unattainable. Still the tendencies and appetencies of the renewed mind are towards that exalted point; and, though weak in himself, the Christian is enabled by the divine assistance to gain such victories over sin, even in the present world, as are a pledge of that triumphant moment when he shall be made "more than conqueror, *through him that loved him.*"

The sanctification which the apostle was to inculcate was evidently a progressive principle. The Christian's life cannot be stationary: we are going forward or going back: we are attaining new acquirements, or we are forgetting what we already know. It is as true as it is awful, that "because men have no changes, they forget God;" so that to increase in feeling our sinfulness and lamenting it, to grow deeply in penitence, and contrition, and humility, is surely a far more favorable indication, than constantly to maintain that we experience no alternation of feeling, no fluctuations of hope or confidence. The man who is really acquainted with the sanctifying influences of the Divine Spirit, though he will earnestly deprecate the idea of self-righteousness and self-dependence, will not remain uninterested or inactive; but will endeavor, with

prayer, and diligence, and increasing dependence upon God, to "press forward towards the mark for the prize of his high calling," not from a presumptuous feeling of human merit or human strength, but from the scriptural assurance, that "He who hath begun the good work will perform it in him unto the day of Jesus Christ."

To delineate fully the nature and extent of Christian holiness is impossible. He only who created the human soul in its original perfection knows the limits of that divine principle with which he re-animates it, and the heavenly nature of that moral change which he has appointed to render it again meet for its eternal destination. Judging merely by ordinary facts, and contemplating the Christian in his daily struggles with the innumerable impediments that oppose his "growth in grace," we must often form a very inadequate estimate of the purity and power of the newly-implanted principle in his heart;—yet, even when thus viewed, and forgetting for a moment the ideal perfection of a principle which we have no opportunity of observing, except under the powerfully counteracting force of a corrupt and sinful nature, we may be often justly surprised at its almost miraculous effects. One such a character, for example, as that of Saint Paul, well studied, and duly contrasted with the highest exaltation of merely human virtue, will present an idea of the practical effects of the gospel in enlightening, sanctifying, and ennobling the human mind, far beyond the greatest conceptions that uninspired reason could suggest or even understand.

Such then is the outline, and but the outline, of that holy religion which as Christians we profess, in distinction to the mere dictates of the unassisted understanding. If then our admitted system be in reality so valuable and complete, how unwise, as well as how wicked, must be the conduct of those, who, amidst all their professions, are at heart depending more upon

the generalities of natural religion than upon the essential peculiarities of the divinely revealed dispensation! The disciples of a Plato, an Aristotle, a Socrates, a Confucius, or a Mahommed, are not ashamed to avow the tenets and imitate the conduct of their acknowledged masters; yet what is more common than for professed Christians virtually to deny their own admitted system, and even while they extol the character of Christ, to shrink from any thing that is exclusively Christian? Those who would perhaps have been zealous devotees of a mere human philosopher, are careless and indifferent respecting Him, the divinity and importance of whose mission they still profess to believe.

But if Christianity be true, it is surely unspeakably important: if it be admitted as our creed, surely it ought to influence and regulate our conduct. Either the commission which was given to the apostle was utterly superfluous, or the scheme of a large portion of professed Christians is essentially defective. We, indeed, acknowledge our belief in the evangelical dispensation; but has that belief had its appropriate effect upon our hearts? Have our *eyes been opened* to perceive the leading truths of revelation; especially our individual demerits, and our consequent guilt, as well as our inability to save ourselves by the best deeds which, since the fall of man, we are able to perform? Had the desire to obtain *forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified*, become the predominant feeling of our heart? Has such a radical change of character taken place in us as is intimated in the expression of being *turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God?* Is the future reward promised by Christianity among *them that are sanctified* rendered congenial to our feelings, and become an object of our desire, by an incipient course of holiness already commenced in us by the sacred Spirit, and which we hope to see matured

to perfection in the future world? Has sin, not only under its more offensive character of *vice*, but in its most specious and alluring forms, become so disgusting to us, in consequence of the renovation of our nature, that we earnestly desire to be freed, not only from its consequence, but also from its dominion, and to return, by the grace of God, as far as possible to that primeval but long-lost purity of soul in which man was originally created? If effects analogous to these have not taken place in our hearts, and been exhibited in our lives, our religion has hitherto been merely a formal and unmeaning recognition, instead of a due belief and a practical experience. If, however, Christianity be such as has been attempted to be described, it deserves, on every account, the highest attention of the understanding, and the most devout affections of the heart. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

ESSAY

ON THE

INFLUENCE OF A MORAL LIFE ON OUR JUDGMENT IN MATTERS OF FAITH.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.—John, vii. 17.

In tracing the origin and progress of religion in the human soul, it is impossible to reduce it to a series of precise and invariable operations, and to allot to each of our faculties and powers its definite share in the general process. It seems indeed to be the ordinary course of the Holy Spirit, in his agency on the heart and mind of man, first to illuminate and convince —then to convert—then to sanctify; or, in other words, first to lead men to a perception of their natural condition, and of the character of the gospel; to teach them their sinfulness and spiritual inability, and to pour into their hearts the grace of contrition and penitence; then to guide them as conscious transgressors to the great Sacrifice of Calvary, to repose by faith in the death and merits of the Saviour alone for pardon and acceptance with God; and then to bestow upon them that peace which accompanies a true and lively faith—to sanctify them by his gracious influences—and to render them fruitful in every good word and work, as becometh those, who, being bought with

a price, are not their own, but are bound in point of duty, and are also anxious in conformity with their renewed nature, to live no longer unto themselves, but unto Him who loved them and gave himself for them. But the successive stages of this spiritual process do not always follow each other in the strict order assigned to them by artificial systems of theology : sometimes the understanding, sometimes the will, sometimes the affections, seem to take the lead. The graces of love, joy, faith, zeal, humility, vigilance, knowledge, though co-existing in the heart of every true Christian, do not always unite in equal proportions, or follow each other at accurately defined intervals. They mutually act and re-act, augmenting each other by their reciprocal influence ; so that what was originally an *effect*, becomes in its turn a *cause*, and gives birth to new causes and effects in perpetual succession.

These remarks apply in an especial manner to the three Christian graces of *Knowledge*, *Faith*, and *Obedience*. Strictly speaking, there must be some degree of knowledge before there can be faith : " he that cometh to God must first know that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." There must also be faith before there can be genuine obedience ; for faith is the only true source of Christian virtue. Yet, on the other hand, our Lord teaches us that " if any man will *do the will of God*,"—that is, will commence a course of humble and ingenuous obedience,—" he shall *know* of the doctrine ;" his practical attention to duty shall prove the harbinger of new accessions of spiritual information ; and not of information only, but of faith also ; for the scriptures accurately trace up the want of faith to a moral as well as merely mental obliquity : they speak of " an evil *heart* of unbelief,"—an expression which, however peculiar it may seem, will, upon investigation, be found perfectly philosophical, and consistent with the phenomena of daily fact and experience.

We shall illustrate the subject under consideration, by a series of remarks bearing upon the two following propositions :—

First, *That unholiness either of heart or life has a powerful influence in depraving the judgment in matters of religion ;* and

Secondly, *That an humble and conscientious endeavor to "do the will of God," is eminently conducive to the progress both of faith and spiritual understanding.*

First. The effect of unholiness of heart and life in producing false judgment in matters of faith, will be most conspicuously, though by no means exclusively, seen in the case of *professed infidels.* Among those who have rejected the evidences for the truth of the gospel, where shall we find an individual who has conscientiously submitted to its allowedly excellent moral restraints? If we except a very few persons, whom literary habits, or a virtuous education, or self-respect, or an ostensible station in society, or a natural inertness of temperament, or a secret misgiving of conscience, has restrained from the grosser excesses of vicious indulgence, where shall we discover a professed infidel who does not prove by his conduct that his rejection of the gospel is so closely connected with laxity of principle, or immorality of life, as to furnish the strongest reason to conclude, that the one is the chief cause of the other ;—that he has discarded religion precisely because he disrelishes its inhibitions and commands. The mere circumstance of the co-existence of two facts does not indeed necessarily prove their connexion as cause and effect : but where this connexion is frequent and striking, it furnishes a strong *prima facie* presumption ; and that presumption is increased we may say to certainty, when, as in the case under consideration, powerful *à priori* reasons may be assigned why that effect *ought* to follow, which we find in point

of fact *does* actually follow, such and such causes. In the late inundation of irreligious writings, for example, we see infidelity joined in striking and intimate union with a spirit of envy, detraction, sedition, blasphemy, and numerous other things "contrary to sound" (that is, to Christian) "doctrine." And can we doubt that these evil propensities were among the exciting *causes* of that infidelity; which, in its turn, would naturally give birth to a new progeny of vices? Is it a circumstance peculiar to theology, that what men dislike, they easily persuade themselves to disbelieve? Is it extraordinary, that immorality should nurture irreligion? Was it an anomaly in the human mind, that certain late conspirators, who could deliberately steel their souls to treason, and combine without remorse to wade to their diabolical purpose through streams of human blood, should profess an obdurate infidelity, and expire even on the scaffold itself, avowing a stern and ferocious enmity to all that good men consider, on irrefragable proofs, to be a revelation from heaven? Was not all this precisely in character? Would not the contrary have been the more surprising fact? Would it not have been difficult to believe that such extreme wickedness could exist without eventually *generating* infidelity, even if it had not found infidelity already in being, at hand to assist its efforts, and to blot out the fearful prospect of a future retribution?

But we need not resort to such *extreme cases*, in proof of the powerful effects of unholiness of heart and life in inclining men to a rejection of the gospel; for as there are vices of less malignant aspect than treason and murder, so also there are various approaches towards infidelity, of a more specious character than the revolting blasphemies of a profligate atheism. There is not an anti-christian or an unchristian principle which may not lead to a corresponding anti-christian or unchristian creed. The more *malignant passions* will have this effect; as we find from Acts, xiii.,

where we are informed, (ver. 48,) that the Gentiles "were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord, and *believed*;" but the Jews, (ver. 45,) "being *filled with envy*, spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming." The *selfish* passions also may produce the same effect. Thus "the Pharisees, *who were covetous*, heard all these things, and derided him." (Luke, xvi. 14.)—The *proud* and *vain* and *ambitious* passions also may have the same effect. "They did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for *they loved the praise of men* more than the praise of God." "How can ye *believe*, that receive honor one of another?" Thus enmity, covetousness, vain-glory, to which various other evil principles might be added, are proved by scriptural testimony to be capable of subverting faith, and even of conducting men to the awful extremes of contradiction, derision, and blasphemy.

It would be easy to proceed to show still more specifically, both by scripture and fact, the injurious influence of sinful dispositions and habits in alienating the mind, not only from *the love*, but also from *the understanding*, as well as *the belief*, of the truth. To these sources may we also usually trace up those less glaring species of infidelity which display themselves in Antinomianism, Socinianism, and kindred heresies. Even where there is no temptation to palliate the enormities of a profligate life, there may be secret sins, sins of a more decorous kind, sins of the heart or sins of the intellect, which may greatly impede the spiritual perceptions, as well as vitiate the spiritual taste. In casting a glance over the names of the most celebrated persons who have enrolled themselves among the abettors of such dangerous principles as have just been alluded to, we shall discover in one a stubborn pertinacity which renders the admission of unwelcome truth into a mind under its influence morally impossi-

ble; in another, a hardihood which shrinks at no consequences, even though the declarations of God himself should be disputed and traduced before the bar of human presumption; in a third, a levity; in a fourth, a self-conceit; in a fifth, a petulance; in a sixth, a fearless self-confidence; in a seventh, a proud dictatorial dogmatism;—in all, a mental aversion to divine truth, which must inevitably prevent a devout submission to scriptural authority, and the establishment of just and sober conclusions from scriptural premises.

Nor are such dispositions and habits less really culpable in the sight of God than those sins which men of the world look upon with greater abhorrence. *Pride*, in particular, in all its shapes, is one of the most offensive and injurious of evils; and in no form more so than when it wears the semblance of intellectual imperiousness. This species of pride has from the first ages of the gospel to the present moment been always averse to "the truth as it is in Jesus." The Scribes and Pharisees, confiding in their boasted attainments, and exclaiming, "Are we blind also?" preferred remaining among those self-sufficient "wise and prudent" to whom the gospel was hidden, to being numbered among those "babes" in simplicity to whom it pleased God to reveal it. Saint Paul alludes to the same evil disposition of mind, when, in writing to the Corinthians, he says, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." An *humble and conscientious* use of the powers of the human understanding and of the best

aids of literature, is indeed eminently serviceable in the cause of truth ; for Christianity has nothing to fear from the most rigid scrutiny : but the *misdirection* or *perversion* of the intellect—and no misdirection or perversion is more baneful than that which springs from self-sufficiency—is one of the most frequent causes of false judgment in matters of faith. How often do we find, even in the case of persons who are not vicious in their lives,—nay, who perhaps preserve a respectable decorum of conduct,—that *the heart* is prejudiced against a practical admission of divine truth, at least of its more peculiar and mysterious doctrines, on account of the scriptures not making their appeal to mankind in such a manner as to gratify the pride of *the intellect*. They find themselves required to believe promptly and implicitly, upon the strength of a divine declaration ; they are enjoined to admit, without hesitation or scruple, many things that they cannot fully understand ; and they are invited, yea, commanded, on pain of eternal condemnation, to embrace exactly the same faith which has been professed by thousands of the most illiterate of mankind ;—in common, it is true, with men of the highest order of thought, and the most extensive range of literature ; but still a faith which owns no submission to human intellect, and refuses to bow its lofty claims before the tribunal of any created mind, however wide its grasp or exalted its powers. A mind vain of its intellectual superiority, and unsubdued by the grace of God, will not easily be persuaded to submit to this : it will recoil from such an unreserved self-dedication : it will demand something more conciliating to the pride of the human heart ; and will venture peremptorily to set down as false, whatever cannot be inferred by the deductions of uninspired reason, or, at least, which, *when revealed*, cannot be fathomed and fortified by human philosophy.

To illustrate the subject by an example :—To what

but to this cause, combining indeed with some other subordinate ones, must we attribute the vehement opposition which has always been carried on against that fundamental article of the Christian system, and of our Protestant Church—the doctrine of *justification solely by faith?* The humble practical Christian, whether poor or rich, illiterate or learned, discovers no moral danger attending this doctrine: so far from it, he feels it to be in his own case, and observes it to be in the case of others, not only "very full of comfort," but a powerful motive to love, to gratitude, and to good works; and he is perfectly convinced, that if any person would so far abuse it as to say, "Let us sin, that grace may abound," they understand not its real nature—much less are they among those who have a scriptural right to take to themselves the blessings which it exhibits. But the mere intellectual reasoner, experiencing nothing of the practical effects of the gospel in his own soul, affectedly recoils at such a doctrine. It is not enough to prove that it is revealed in the sacred scriptures; it must also comport with his long-cherished prejudices and prepossessions, or, as he considers them, his reasonable deductions: he must see that the doctrine has some other basis to rest upon than mere authority, even though that authority be the authority of God himself; for, till he can fully demonstrate the propriety of this divine arrangement, and solve every difficulty which a presumptuous intellect may consider as flowing from it, (which he is least of all likely to do while he remains in his present attitude of mind,) he will not submit to the doctrines of the cross of Christ, or adore that "mystery of godliness" which is involved in every part of the disclosures of revelation.

But *gross vices* on the one hand, and *mental sins* on the other, (to which two classes of impediments the preceding remarks have been chiefly confined,) are not the *only* forms of moral evil which may cloud our

judgment in matters of faith. For, in fact, even *the widely tolerated habits in which the great body of mankind pass their lives; the love of worldly company, and the fashionable gratifications of the age*, slight as such causes may seem, powerfully exert the same influence. The votaries of the world, in all its forms, the more decent, as well as the disreputable, plainly perceive that the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, if admitted and acted upon *in their real spirit*, would cut up, at the very roots, their most cherished habits and predilections; and hence a species of practical infidelity is gradually suffered to steal over the mind, till the judgment itself is at length incapacitated for the office of piercing through the thick veil of passions and prepossessions which have accumulated to intercept the rays of celestial truth.

Nay—we may go yet farther; for even the sincere Christian himself may too often discover within his own bosom a decisive proof of the powerful effects of unholiness of heart or life, in obscuring the spiritual understanding and weakening the faith. No sooner does he relax in his Christian vigilance,—no sooner does he become secularized in his temper,—no sooner does he grieve the Holy Spirit by pride, or lukewarmness, or the neglect of prayer, or inattention to any known duty, or indulgence in any known sin,—than he finds that he cannot realize, as at more devout moments, the sentiments which become his holy profession: he perhaps feels inclined to harbor a secret wish that he may have too strictly construed the self-denying character of the gospel. His mind begins at times to waver respecting some of its essential truths; and while thus under the influence of temptation, he may even venture for a moment to question its divine authority. No Christian stands so firmly as not to require to "take heed lest he fall;" and though there may seem to be a very wide interval between incipient sins of the heart, and such a lapsed state of mind and affections as amounts, for the time at least, to little short of infidel-

ity ; yet, upon further reflection it will be evident, that this interval is less wide than at first sight appears, and that in fact there is *a very close connexion* between such a state of the heart as makes it a man's interest that the gospel, or any of its doctrines, should be false, and the temptation to believe that very possibly they *are* so. At all events, sinful habits or affections, of whatever kind, have such a deadening effect upon the soul, that even where they do not open a direct way to nominal infidelity, they essentially impede the operations of faith, and inevitably cause every Christian grace to wither and decay ; so that whether the man become a *speculative* unbeliever or not, he, at least for the time, becomes a *practical* one.

In thus illustrating the fact, that unholiness, either of heart or life, has a powerful influence in depraving the judgment in matters of faith, some of the *causes* of this unhappy effect have been incidentally mentioned. It may, however, be useful to consider these causes somewhat more definitely.

It is obvious, then, in the first place, that where the life is allowedly unchristian, there cannot possibly exist *any serious wish to be right on the subject of religion ;* and such a *defect of will* is always a powerful cause of obliquity of judgment. The scriptures constantly attribute both doctrinal and practical error to a corrupt state of the moral and spiritual volitions. "Ye *will* not come unto me," said our blessed Lord, "that ye might have life." Had the wish existed, the power would not have been withheld. "If any man be anxious to do the will of God (θέλῃ ποιεῖν.) he shall know of the doctrine ;" but where such a disposition of heart does not exist, there will be a threefold barrier to the attainment of truth ; namely, *a want of suitable application, a want of aptitude to learn, and a want of divine instruction.*

A want of suitable application.—A correct knowledge of the Christian scheme of faith and duty is not

an intuitive endowment: it can be acquired only in an attentive perusal of the sacred scriptures; in frequent meditation upon their contents, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual;" in the conscientious use of every subordinate assistance, and in earnest prayer for the divine illumination and guidance. But where there exists no adequate desire to know and practise the will of God, such an application of mind, and such a devotion of heart, to sacred studies, are not to be expected; and consequently we cannot hope that a right judgment should be attained in matters of faith, except indeed so far as an orthodox education, or other advantageous circumstances may have operated, unsought for by the individual, to enlighten his understanding, even while they failed of converting his heart.

A want of aptitude to learn, was further mentioned as an unavoidable concomitant of wilful unholiness of heart or life; for not only is a mind under the influence of sin rendered averse to the humble study of divine subjects, but the necessary prerequisites for studying them aright are wanting. We constantly perceive, in ordinary life, and on points quite unconnected with theology, the powerful influence of particular habits in producing an inaptitude for the perception of truth on subjects which, to all but the parties thus prepossessed, appear sufficiently plain. The arguments which would fully convince an unprejudiced person of the criminality of importing or vending illicit articles of merchandize, would have no effect upon the mind of a practised smuggler. The most elaborate dissertation upon the atrocity of a piratical life, would be lost upon the callous perceptions of an Algerine corsair. And without adverting to such extreme cases, do we not perceive, in the daily occurrences of civilized society, that a familiarity with certain practices, and the frequently recurring, though scarcely noticed, temptations arising from them to shut the eyes and harden the heart against the truth, have the effect of gradually raising

the most powerful impediments to a right judgment on these particular points ; and this perhaps even where there is no distinct consciousness, in any individual instance, of a wilful opposition to the force of evidence ? We see this observation forcibly exemplified in the conduct of warm party-men of all sects, ages, and countries. We may also observe, in almost every profession and avocation of life, the prevalence of particular practices, which, to all but the individuals concerned, bear an undeniable character of moral delinquency, but the sinfulness of which the offenders themselves, even though in other respects virtuously inclined, do not perceive, because they have lost, in that particular point, the moral discrimination which is necessary to render the most powerful evidence and suasion effectual to produce conviction and amendment.

And thus it is in the case under consideration ; for how is it possible that a dispensation, of which the prominent feature is " righteousness and true holiness," should approve itself either to the judgment or the heart of a being whose perceptions are clouded by moral prejudice and the love of sin ? For example, the scriptures every where exhibit to us the excellency of the law of God : but how can this excellency be duly felt by one who regards that law with abhorrence, on account of the restraints which it imposes upon his unbridled appetites ? The scriptures again constantly speak of the happiness of a life of devotion to God : but how can this be admitted by one who places his happiness exclusively in earthly gratifications ? The scriptures declare that " to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace :" but how can this be credited by one whose whole practice proceeds upon quite a contrary estimate ? The scriptures speak throughout of sin, in all its modifications, as an evil of enormous magnitude : but to such a person no evil is apparent, except indeed so far as the temporal interests of society are concerned. The

scriptures describe the equity of God in visiting every breach of his laws with the severest infliction of judgment: but to a man in the state of mind we are describing, such a proceeding appears far from equitable; and he even ventures, perhaps, to think it nothing short of tyranny to inflict punishment for what he calls the "innocent propensities" of the human character. The scriptures speak of whatever is holy, whatever resembles God, as excellent and lovely: but the individual in question perceives no loveliness in any thing of the kind: on the contrary, he views a life of piety as both morbid and misanthropical; and would gladly prefer the vain pleasures of a sinful, as well as a transitory existence, to what he is pleased to consider the gloom and austerity of scriptural devotion. In short, while his whole constitution remains under the dominion of sin, there must necessarily be a corresponding inaptitude for attaining a right judgment on religious subjects; for such subjects, it must ever be remembered, are not, like the deductions of mathematical or physical science, merely speculative;—no—they powerfully affect the life and actions, they involve the operation of the will and affections and therefore the study of them can be entered upon with advantage only where there is a suitable "preparation of heart;" and such a preparation, it is obvious, can never exist where a preference for the ways of sin is deliberately cherished.

The absence of divine instruction, was also mentioned as a most important reason why those who have no wish to "do the will of God," are not likely "to know of the doctrine," at least in a way conducive to their salvation. The scriptures every where teach us, that divine instruction is essentially necessary to a right understanding in matters of faith; and this instruction, we are further informed, is bestowed only upon the humble and the contrite. "Evil men understand not judgment; but they that seek the Lord understand all things." "A scorner seeketh wisdom,

and findeth it not;" but "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Those who persist in wilful impenitence, the Almighty consigns, in equitable retribution, to the suggestions of a misguided understanding and a hardened heart. Such was strikingly the case with the idolatrous heathen. "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." Likewise, of those who "have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations," Jehovah says, "I will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them: because when I called, none did answer; when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." And to the same effect the Apostle St. Paul, speaking of "the deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish," adds, as *the cause* of this delusive influence, "because they received not *the love of the truth*, that they might be saved."

Having thus seen how powerful is the effect of unholiness of heart and life, in depraving the judgment on religious subjects, we proceed,

SECONDLY, to show that "an humble and conscientious endeavor to *do the will of God*, is eminently conducive to the progress both of faith and spiritual understanding."

In pursuing this second line of discussion, we shall employ the converse of the arguments urged under the first, and endeavor to prove that an ingenuous obedience to the will of God is conducive to a right judgment in matters of faith. First, because it supposes conscientious application to the subject; Secondly, because it shows a suitable preparation for instruction; and, Thirdly, because God will not withhold from such an inquirer the secret guidance of his Holy Spirit, by whose aid alone we can "have a right judgment in all things," or in any thing, necessary to our salvation

And first, it is a very important advance towards a correct understanding in religion, when the mind is honestly *disposed for serious investigation*. The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily, whether the things which were told them by the apostles were so;" and it is immediately added, "*therefore* many of them believed." As has been already remarked, while the heart is enslaved by sin, there can be no taste for the practical study of the word of God. Religion, of all subjects, is that which is least likely to attract suitable attention; and hence, the very circumstance of entering upon such inquiries as those which concern our eternal destination, with a seriousness and zeal proportioned to their importance, is always an auspicious symptom.

Nor can we doubt that a cordial desire to do the will of God, *will* thus lead to diligence in investigating it. In human society, a sincere wish on the part of an individual to oblige a friend whom he respects and loves, or to conform to the rules of an institution to which he has voluntarily attached himself, naturally induces him to make diligent inquiry into the means of so doing, in order that he may not offend by negligence or ignorance those whom he would not alienate by wilful misconduct. A similar effect takes place in religion; so that a conscientious wish to do the will of God, will not only operate in a constant endeavor to perform his commands *so far as they are hitherto understood*, but it will also be found, under the guidance of his Holy Spirit, to operate *still farther*, in leading to such a devout study of the word of God, such earnest prayer for his blessing and direction, and such a diligent use of every means of instruction, as cannot but issue in a competency of knowledge and faith, as well as practical obedience.

Again—this desire to obey the known commands of God, is of essential service to a right knowledge in matters of faith, because it indicates a suitable *prepa-*

ration of mind for coming to the knowledge of the divine will. We have already seen how fatal an influence is exerted, not only by habits of gross vice, but by every unholy thought and temper, in blinding the judgment as well as hardening the heart. And in like manner, on the other hand, every incipient desire to obey the commands of God, opens the way for new accessions of faith and spiritual information. It was a wise and truly religious, though but apocryphal, apophthegm, that "He that keepeth the law of the Lord getteth the understanding thereof; and the perfection of the fear of the Lord is wisdom." (Ecclus. xxi. 11.) The *sacred* text is equally explicit: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments." "With *the heart* man believeth unto righteousness." "He that doth the will of God, shall know of the doctrine."

The fact thus scripturally asserted, is quite conformable to what we might naturally expect from a due consideration of the circumstances of the case. For, in the first place, a person who advances to the study of the sacred oracles with an humble determination to obey the will of God, avoids most of those *sources of error* which have been mentioned in a former part of these remarks. Not having any wish to render his religious scheme subservient to the indulgence of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," he is not biassed by a false self-interest to explain away to his own conscience the awful declarations of the word of God relative to sin and sinners. His researches not being conducted with a view to any sinister or secondary object, he is not tempted to "wrest the scriptures to his own condemnation." His paramount desire being to know the mind, and to obey the commands of God, he will be content, in simplicity and godly sincerity, to follow wherever the scriptures of truth may lead. His moral

endowments, his humility, his integrity, his fear of error, and his love of truth, will prove a constant panoply to guard him from the insidious wiles of his spiritual enemy, and from the suggestions of evil-minded men, whose quarrel with the gospel is more an affair of the heart than of the understanding.

The parable of the sower affords an interesting illustration of the foregoing remarks. The seed sowed was but of one sort; the hand that sowed the different portions of it was the same; yet in some instances it sprang up and bore fruit abundantly, while in others it was either devoured by the fowls of the air, or withered away after a short and unserviceable show of vegetation. Now, whence arose the difference in these cases? The narrative itself informs us. In the former, it was sown in "an honest and good heart;" a heart prepared by the Holy Spirit, through penitence, faith, humility, and an earnest wish to obey the will of God, for its reception; while in the latter, it fell either upon a superficial or a rocky soil, or among briers and thorns, "the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches," which choked it, so that it brought forth no fruit to perfection.

The third and chief reason why an humble and ingenuous inquirer will attain to a right understanding in religion, while those whose immorality of heart or life proves their practical indifference to the subject, are left to the natural blindness of the human understanding, is intimated in that inspired promise; "The meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach his way." It is not enough that there be diligence in study; it is not even enough that the heart be in a state of preparation; for, in addition to this, the divine blessing and guidance are still requisite to prevent our being deluded by plausible error or misconception. Not only must the organ of vision be opened and turned towards the object, but there must be light from above in order to discern it. And hence we are taught, both in scripture and by our Church, to pray

for the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit; not indeed the sensible impulses claimed by the enthusiast, but that ordinary and unseen agency by which God is pleased to "work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This sacred guidance is promised to all who diligently seek it: so that to every Christian we may apply, at least subordinately, the words of the apostle; "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things."

The narrative of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, furnishes a striking corroboration of the preceding arguments. He is described as "a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." Conscientious in his character, and doubtless guided, though unknown to himself, by the secret influences of the Holy Spirit, he endeavored to act up to his imperfect knowledge of the divine will, at the same time earnestly wishing for a clearer discovery of it than he had hitherto enjoyed, or than his profession and opportunities of instruction seemed likely to afford. Thus devoutly disposed, he was keeping a solemn fast, and was occupied in prayer at the hour of the evening sacrifice, when an angel was divinely commissioned to appear to him, and to direct him in what manner to obtain those instructions which issued in his plenary information and baptism into the faith of Christ.

The case of the Ethiopian eunuch is somewhat analogous. He evinced his sincere desire to obey the will of God, and his preparation of heart to receive the doctrine of the gospel, by taking a long journey in order to worship at Jerusalem; by diligently perusing the holy scriptures, "which were able to make him wise to salvation," and by gladly accepting the proffered instructions of Philip, who had been expressly commissioned by an angel to meet him on his way.

In both these instances, we see the promises before cited, of divine guidance to the humble and obedient inquirer, fulfilled, not only in a very remarkable, but even a miraculous, manner: yet the very circumstances which exclude these cases from the rank of ordinary precedents, prove most forcibly the general truth under consideration; for we find from these narratives, that, sooner than a heart prepared and disposed to receive religious instruction should be left finally destitute of it, an angel was commissioned from heaven, and an apostle or other special messenger appointed to convey the necessary intelligence.

The circumstances of these two memorable instances will farther supply a satisfactory answer to some of the chief objections which may possibly be alleged against the views contained in the preceding pages.

Should it be urged, for example, on the one hand, by any systematic doctrinalists, that an endeavor, however ingenuous, to obey the commands of God, while there still remains great doctrinal ignorance in the mind, is not likely to lead beyond mere formalism or pharisaism—nay, is even less favorable to an humble reception of the gospel, than a state of allowed vice;—these remarkable instances, in which the Almighty was pleased to honor such a teachable disposition of mind with peculiar approbation, and to gratify the desires of these penitent inquirers by miraculously sending to them the knowledge of the truth, will prove the fallacy of so unscriptural an hypothesis. The case of the Scribes and Pharisees, of whom our Lord said that publicans and sinners should enter the kingdom of God before them, was of a very different kind. In those haughty self-justiciaries there was no disposition conscientiously to perform even the ordinary duties of morality: they subverted the divine law by vain traditions and superstitions; and, far from exhibiting any tenderness of conscience, any disposition to practise what they already knew, and to look humbly for further instruction, they were perfectly contented with

their own attainments, and even made use of their knowledge in order to relax by disingenuous glosses the obligations of the system which they professed. It is obvious that such characters possessed nothing in common with the devout and diffident inquirer, to whom exclusively the promises of divine illumination are made.

Or, should it be urged, on the other hand, by a far more numerous class of objectors, that moral conduct is all that is necessary for human salvation; should it be said, in contradiction to the declarations of scripture, and the language of our established Church, that "every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature;" we have here two remarkable cases in which God saw fit in a most conspicuous manner to evince the necessity of divine revelation in general, and particularly of faith in the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ,* and the other distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, by sending chosen servants expressly to instruct Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch in points of this nature, notwithstanding their previous devoutness and moral deportment.

In short, should it be argued that upon the hypothesis which it has been the object of these pages to enforce, any point of Christian faith or practice is rendered unnecessary, we may confidently appeal to the two examples under consideration to prove the contrary. Should it be doubted, for example, whether an ingen-

* The doctrine of the atonement, and the chief points connected with the person and offices of the divine Surety, seem to have been the especial subject of Philip's conversation with the eunuch; for it is said, "The place of the scripture which he read was this, 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? for his life was taken from the earth.' Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus,"—doubtless in the capacity in which this and other prophets represented him, namely, as a Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

uous desire to obey the will of God, even before we are fully acquainted with it, is an important and characteristic mark of incipient conversion, we may adduce the history of Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch, to show how conspicuous a place such a disposition occupied in the first stages of *their* religious inquiries. Or, should it be urged, that if practical obedience be of so much importance, there is no great necessity for prayer or sacred study,—we may remind the objector that it was while the Roman centurion was fasting and praying, and the Ethiopian treasurer was diligently reading the scriptures, that God was pleased to mark his approval of their conduct by sending them the means of further instruction. Or, should it be objected that the preceding remarks would reduce religion to mere ingenuousness of principle, thus superseding the necessity for correctness of religious doctrine and faith,—we may show that these very narratives teach quite a different lesson; for Philip expressly said, "*If thou believest* with all thine heart, thou mayest be baptized; and he answered and said, *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*" And lastly, should it be urged that if practical obedience has such a tendency to lead to scriptural knowledge, the agency of the Holy Spirit is rendered unnecessary, it is obvious to reply from the same narratives, that it was the Holy Spirit, who, though unseen by mortal eyes, implanted and fostered the rising graces of Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch, who further provided the means for their instruction, who opened their hearts to receive it, and who is expressly mentioned as having been present by his divine influences with both these devout men at their baptism; thus showing, throughout the whole process of their conversion, the need of his own all-powerful agency, even while he saw fit to employ the ordinary means of prayer, and fasting, and preparatory dispositions, and the study of the scriptures, and the Christian ministry and sacraments, to effect his gracious purposes.

While thus alluding to some of the principal arguments which may be urged against the main propositions on which this Essay is founded, it may be well to advert to an objection which at first sight appears somewhat plausible; namely, that we often find, in the current phrase, "a weak head joined with an honest heart;" so that the doctrine contended for cannot be generally true. To this it is only necessary to reply, that we have no sufficient proof of the alleged fact that an ingenuous desire to know God, and to obey his will, is not *always* able in due time, by means of the appointed assistances and means of grace, to overcome any obstacles which may arise from want of vigor of understanding; provided, of course, the inaptitude be not of such an extent to render the individual incapable of exercising the ordinary mental functions of a rational agent. Indeed, we not unfrequently observe persons of very confined intellect, and with but feeble means of instruction, acquainted, in a surprising degree, with religious subjects, and able both to reason and to act in spiritual concerns, with a propriety which ought to put to the blush many learned and intellectual, but only nominal, Christians. Besides all which, we must never forget to add the promised assistance of God's Holy Spirit, who will not suffer those who humbly and diligently seek instruction, to perish for want of it. "If thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; for *the Lord giveth wisdom, and out of his mouth* cometh knowledge and understanding." Such is the divine promise; and sooner than it shall fail, a Peter shall be sent to instruct a Cornelius, or a Philip be commissioned to seek out a remote Ethiopian stranger. And if such miraculous interpositions are not to be expected in our own day, (as of course they are not,) it is only because they are no longer necessary for the fulfilment of the divine prom-

ises. The Almighty can and will render the ordinary means of grace, by the blessing of his Holy Spirit, amply sufficient for the instruction of all who are really solicitous to learn. Their progress in divine knowledge may, in many cases, be slow; and their views, after all their efforts, may never become very expansive or elevated; but of thus much we may rest assured, that they shall be preserved from every essential error, and "be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," in that narrow road which leadeth to life everlasting. "A highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." It is not necessary to salvation to be intimately acquainted with every topic even in divinity; much less is it essential for our knowledge to be collected at the first glance by the intuitive sagacity of a perspicacious intellect. The most humble and teachable penitent may for a considerable time find his mind distressed or disturbed: he may wander long in doubt or difficulty; but he shall not wander fatally or finally. Implicit self-dedication to God; prayer for the divine direction; avoiding pride, obstinacy, and flippancy; and conscientiously seeking every opportunity of instruction, constitute a far surer road to Christian knowledge, as well as to faith, than the laborious triflings of a powerful but self-sufficient understanding.

Another objection which may be anticipated to the position laid down in these pages, and the last to which we shall allude, is, that the doctrine contended for is unfortunately too well founded; for that in truth the devout admission of the peculiarities of Christianity is only a pious prejudice, and that such a state of mind as has been described is therefore a very suitable preparation for it. The infidel notoriously urges this argument; and many who assume to themselves the title of "rational Christians" occasionally employ it, at least in a modified form. "What," it is asked

"can moral sensations have to do with intellectual verities? If a man is not likely thoroughly to understand and believe the gospel till he is prepared to obey it, is it not a proof that prepossession rather than argument effected his conversion? Ought not every doctrine professing to come from God to carry with it such irresistible evidence that a man *must* understand and believe it, whatever may be his secret wishes, or however strong his natural prejudices?"—To this it may be fairly replied, that Christianity *is* demonstrable —irrefragably demonstrable—by argument; a point on which it is surely not necessary to enlarge after the many invaluable treatises which have appeared on the subject. But, however demonstrable Christianity, or any of its peculiar doctrines, may be proved to be, still moral, and indeed spiritual, dispositions are required for investigating its claims; for where such dispositions do not exist, there will not even be the taste or capacity for such an investigation; any more than a person destitute of musical perceptions would be likely voluntarily, and for no purpose, to devote himself to the study of Handel, or a man singularly averse to mathematical reasoning to the Principia of Newton. It is not therefore derogating from the demonstrable character of the gospel, to admit, that though its divine Author *might* doubtless have rendered its evidences irresistible, even to the most careless or hardened opponent, he has seen fit to connect the whole of revelation with a system of moral discipline, and to render an obedient heart the surest guide to a perception of its character and evidences. In truth, we may fairly contend, that, had the gospel been a system appealing merely to abstract reasoning, and as susceptible of being correctly estimated by a proud and vicious, as by an humble and dutiful, inquirer, it would have lost one of its strongest evidences; namely, its wonderful adaptation to the actual habits of mankind, whose reasonings are almost in every instance strongly affected by their personal character

and feelings, and who could never have been induced, without a direct miracle, generally to embrace Christianity, even as a system, had it been presented to them in the aspect which the advocates for abstract reasoning unconnected with moral obedience contend that it ought to have assumed.—But this is a large field into which it is impracticable on the present occasion to enter. Let it suffice to have suggested the topic for the consideration of those who have not duly reflected upon the eminent wisdom displayed in the divinely appointed connexion between Christian faith, Christian knowledge, and Christian obedience; or who may have thought the arguments for the gospel weakened rather than strengthened by this union of appeal to the heart and the understanding. It may be consoling also to the diffident Christian, who perhaps finds his faith sometimes endangered, when he hears of persons of alleged powerful minds and great attainments rejecting the gospel, or any of its essential peculiarities, to reflect that they could never have examined into its claims and character aright; for that, even if they applied their intellect to the investigation, they were deficient in those teachable dispositions, those conscientious efforts to obey the known will of God, and those earnest aspirations for the instructions of his Holy Spirit, which the all-wise Founder of Christianity has rendered absolutely necessary for appreciating its merits; a circumstance quite consistent with our views of the character of God, and in full accordance with the fact of mankind being in a state of spiritual discipline and probation.

It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to find a hardened infidel, or a confirmed advocate for any grossly heterodox tenet, who was qualified by the union of prayer, devoutness, a reverential fear of God, a conscientious dread of misinterpreting any statement of the sacred page, an humble distrust of his own judgment, and a determination not to be swayed by his passions or preconceived opinions, to decide upon

the doctrines of holy writ. But very different is the case with such an inquirer as has been described. Does he hear of mysteries in religion? He feels that the world is full of mysteries; and he is too well assured of the unsearchableness of God and the narrow limits of his own understanding to view the mysteries of the gospel as a just obstacle to his belief: indeed, he would rather be inclined to distrust a professedly divine revelation which should contain nothing beyond what was fathomable by the feeble powers of a short-lived and imperfect being like himself. It does not therefore shock his mind to believe with the Church of England, in her First Article,* that though there is but "one living and true God," yet that "in the unity of this Godhead there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Convinced again by daily experience of the powerful tendency of his own heart to gravitate to the world and its vanities; of the manifold temptations to sin which beset him, and of the feebleness of his best unassisted endeavors to resist them; such an inquirer is prepared to understand and to admit, that "man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil;" that "this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated;" that we are at our best estate "miserable sinners;" that "there is no health in us;" that "we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves," and that we cannot "turn and prepare ourselves by our own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God." Thus penitently convinced of his real condition by nature, and disposed to receive the testimony of God, as it unfolds itself to his understanding and conscience, such an inquirer will gratefully perceive the close adaptation of Chris-

* The following references are made exclusively to the Articles and Liturgy of the Church of England; but the attentive reader will be easily able to refer to corresponding passages of holy scripture, on which they are grounded.

tianity to the necessities of those for whose benefit it is revealed; and will find a powerful incidental argument for its truth and divine origin, in that consolatory doctrine, that "the Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature;" and in this nature "truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men;" and, further, that "we are accounted righteous before God only for the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works and deservings." At the same time, anxious to obey the will of God, and prepared, by holy dispositions of heart and moral habits of life, to make a disinterested judgment in those matters of faith which relate to our submission to the divine commands, he perceives nothing to lead him to suppose that this fundamental tenet of scripture, this foundation-stone of our own Church, has any licentious tendency; or that it is otherwise than "a most wholesome doctrine," as well as "very full of comfort." Far from feeling inclined to take advantage of it with a view to sin in order that grace may abound, he is conscious from his daily experience of its sanctifying tendency: his faith, in proportion as it is "true and lively," he finds to be "necessarily productive of good works;" so that he perceives the wisdom of the divine arrangement in securing the interests of morality by means of that very dispensation which reveals free and unmerited pardon, justification, and salvation to every true believer, in virtue of the obedience unto death of his all-sufficient Surety.